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GREATEST QUEENS

The remarkable women who have shaped history from antiquity to the present day

Digital Edition

FIRST EDITION

FROM THE MAKERS OF ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Welcome to

GREATEST QUEENS

The history of royalty is a history of remarkable queens, many of whom wielded power in deeply patriarchal societies. Yet many of these women's lives have been sidelined, ignored or discussed in relation to so-called 'great men'. This bookazine brings these women, their lives, deeds and legacies into full focus. From well-known names to extraordinary figures you may never have heard of before, discover how queens have shaped history from antiquity to the present day.

FUTURE

GREATEST QUEENS

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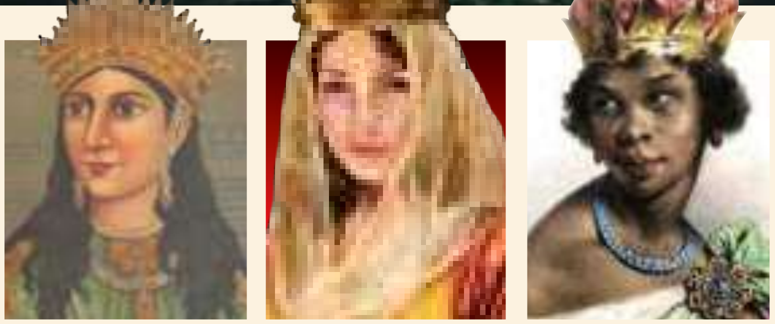

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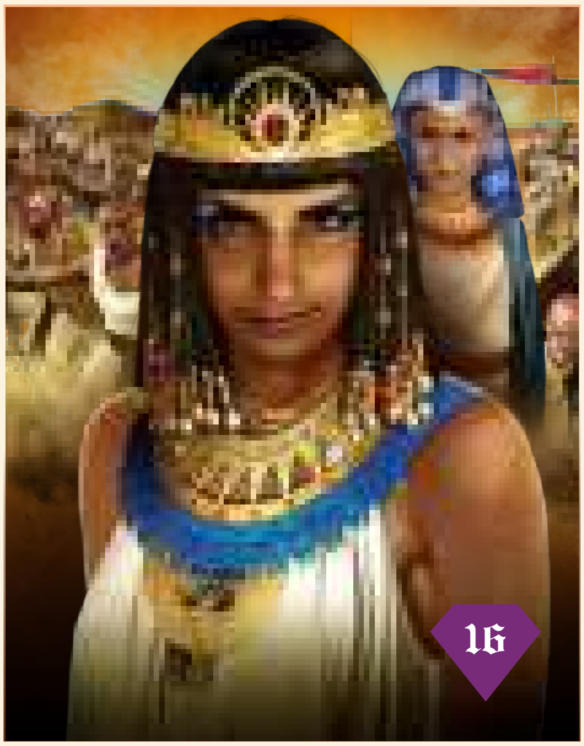

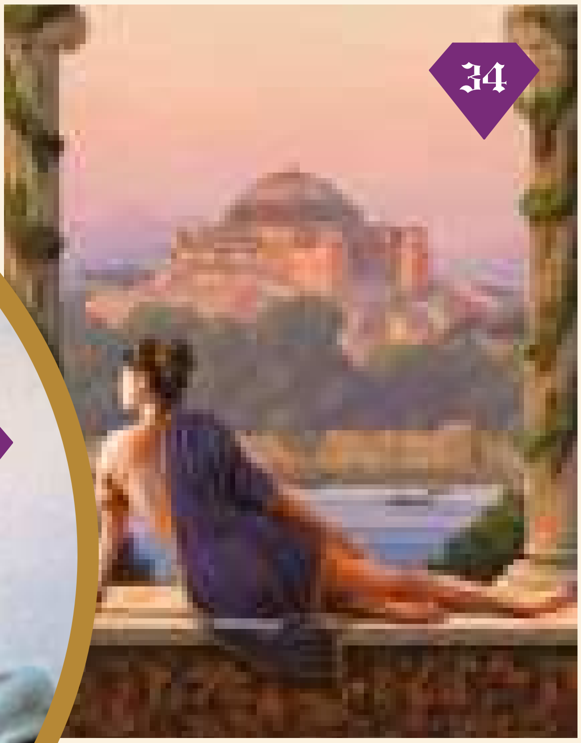

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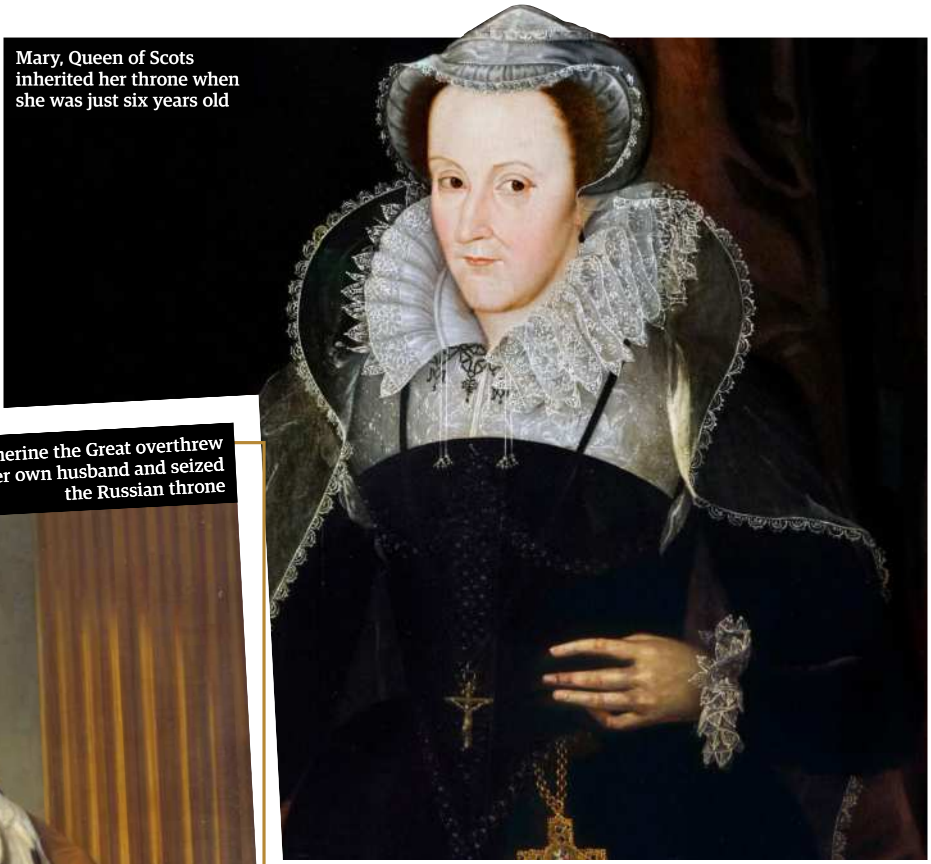
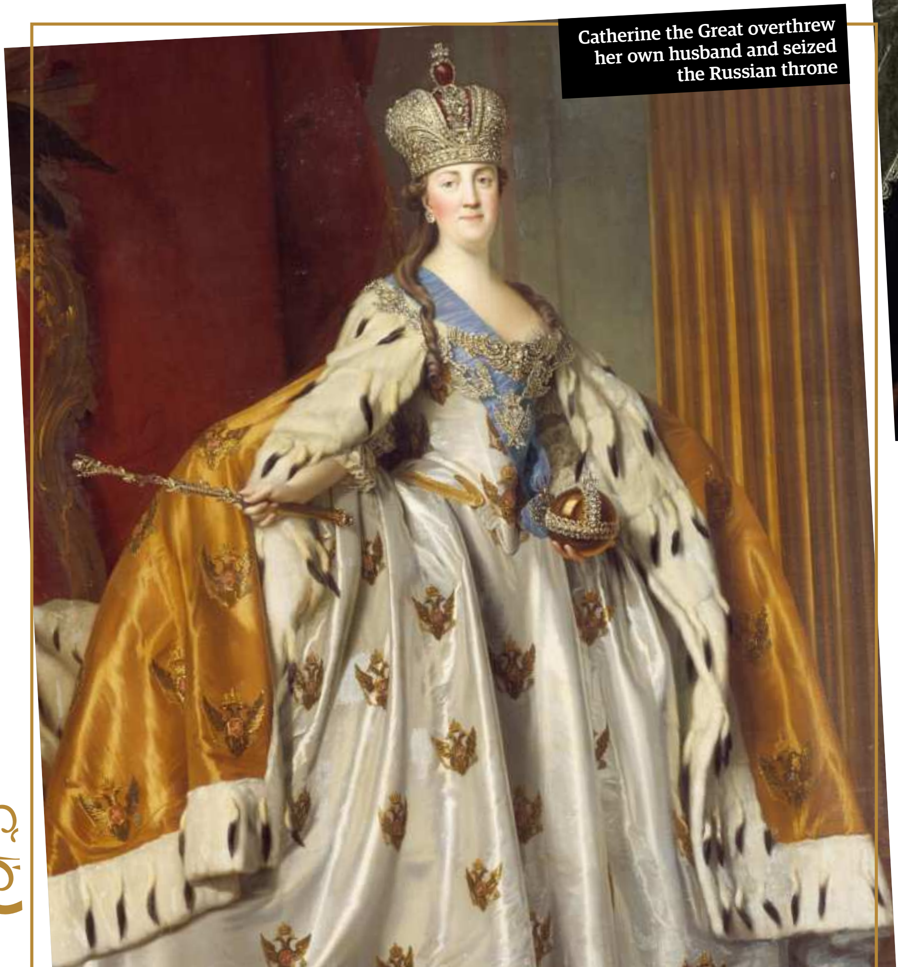
ALL ABOUT QUEENS

An introduction to the intriguing world of queenship

What do you think about when you hear the word 'queen'? Perhaps Elizabeth II or Anne Boleyn come to mind? Of course, there will always be queens who dominate our attention. However, the world of queenship is diverse and fascinating, and there are various categories of queens to learn about. After all, female power can be found all over the world and throughout history.

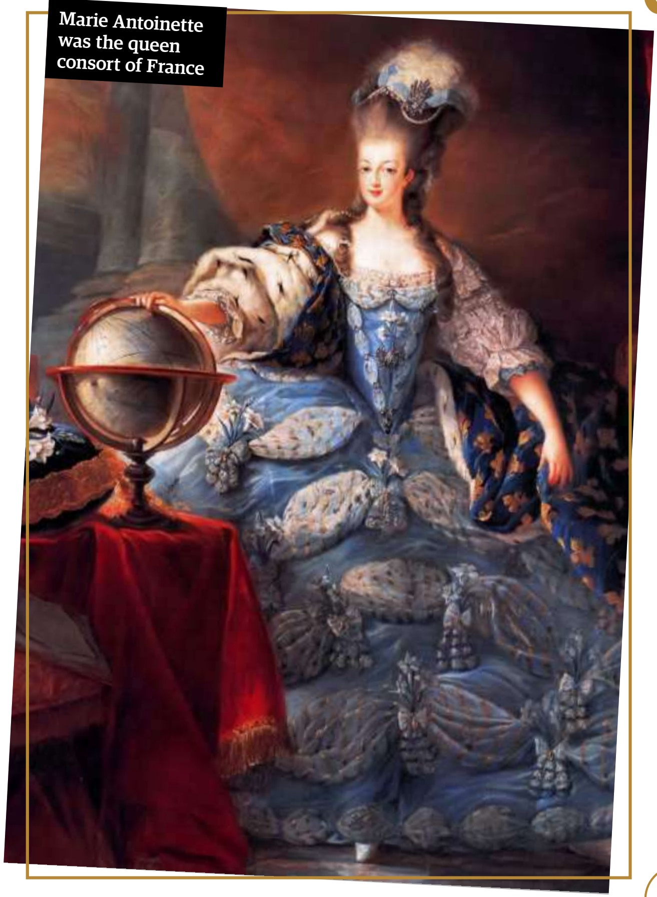

Mary, Queen of Scots inherited her throne when she was just six years old


Catherine the Great overthrew her own husband and seized the Russian throne

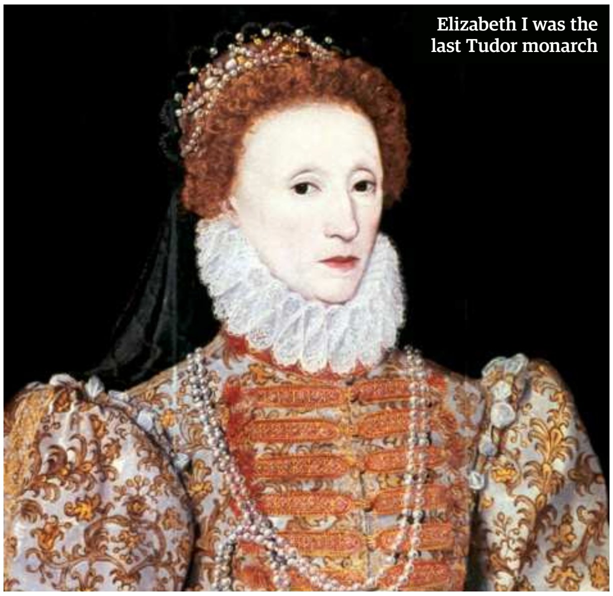
For instance, Tamar the Great and Mary, Queen of Scots are two examples of queens regnant–women who ruled in their own right. While some of the queens regnant in this bookazine came to the throne through inheritance, others, like Catherine the Great or Empress Irene, who overthrew their husband and son respectively, came to their thrones through coups.

There are, of course, queen consorts–spouses of the king–like Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie Antoinette. Then there are regents, usually the

Elizabeth II was the longest-reigning monarch in British history



Marie Antoinette was the queen consort of France



Elizabeth I was the last Tudor monarch

spouse or mother of a monarch, who take over when the current monarch is incapacitated, absent, or underage. Examples of regents include Catherine de' Medici and Dorothea of Brandenburg.

These women were expected to live up to the many expectations of what it means to be a queen. For example, they were expected to be good mothers and wives, devout and chaste, participate in efforts to bring about peace, set the fashion trends at court, and produce an heir to the throne in order to ensure the line of succession. Additionally, if they were a queen regnant, they were expected to be good rulers.

But not all queens adhered to or fulfilled those standards. For instance, Queen Anne endured 17 pregnancies, including miscarriages and stillbirths, with the devastating result of none of her children surviving to adulthood. Elizabeth I, on the other hand, is well known for never marrying and having no children, meaning the Tudor dynasty ended with her. This does not, however, mean that their reigns were a failure.

It is impossible to cover every queen in this bookazine. As you read on, you'll come across a variety of queens, some of whom you may have heard of and some of whom you might not, all of whom were formidable in their own right. There are even some women whose inclusion in a 'greatest queens' title is debatable, but that doesn't mean their interesting tales shouldn't be shared. So, what are you waiting for? Go and take a step into the world of queenship and see what you can discover! ◆

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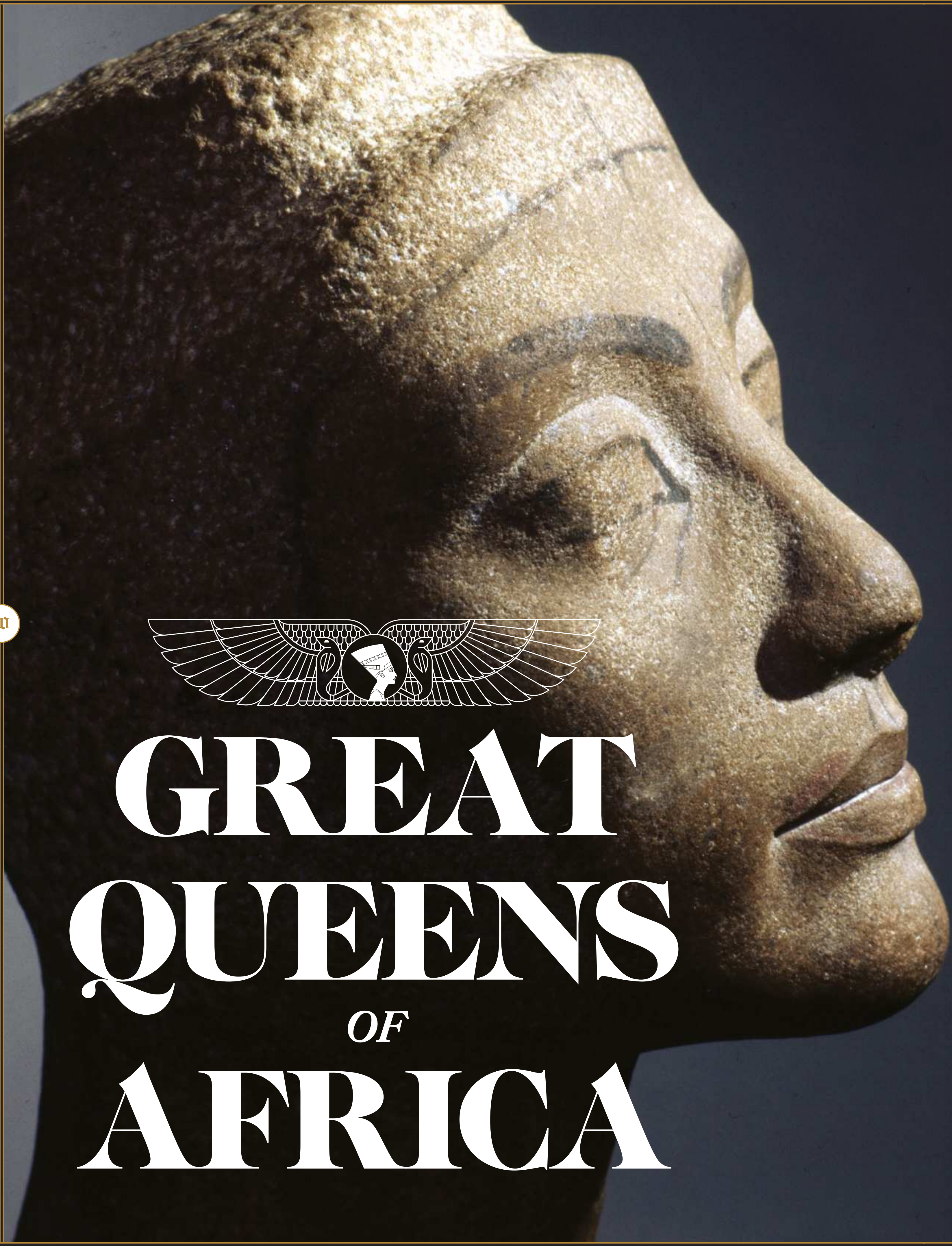
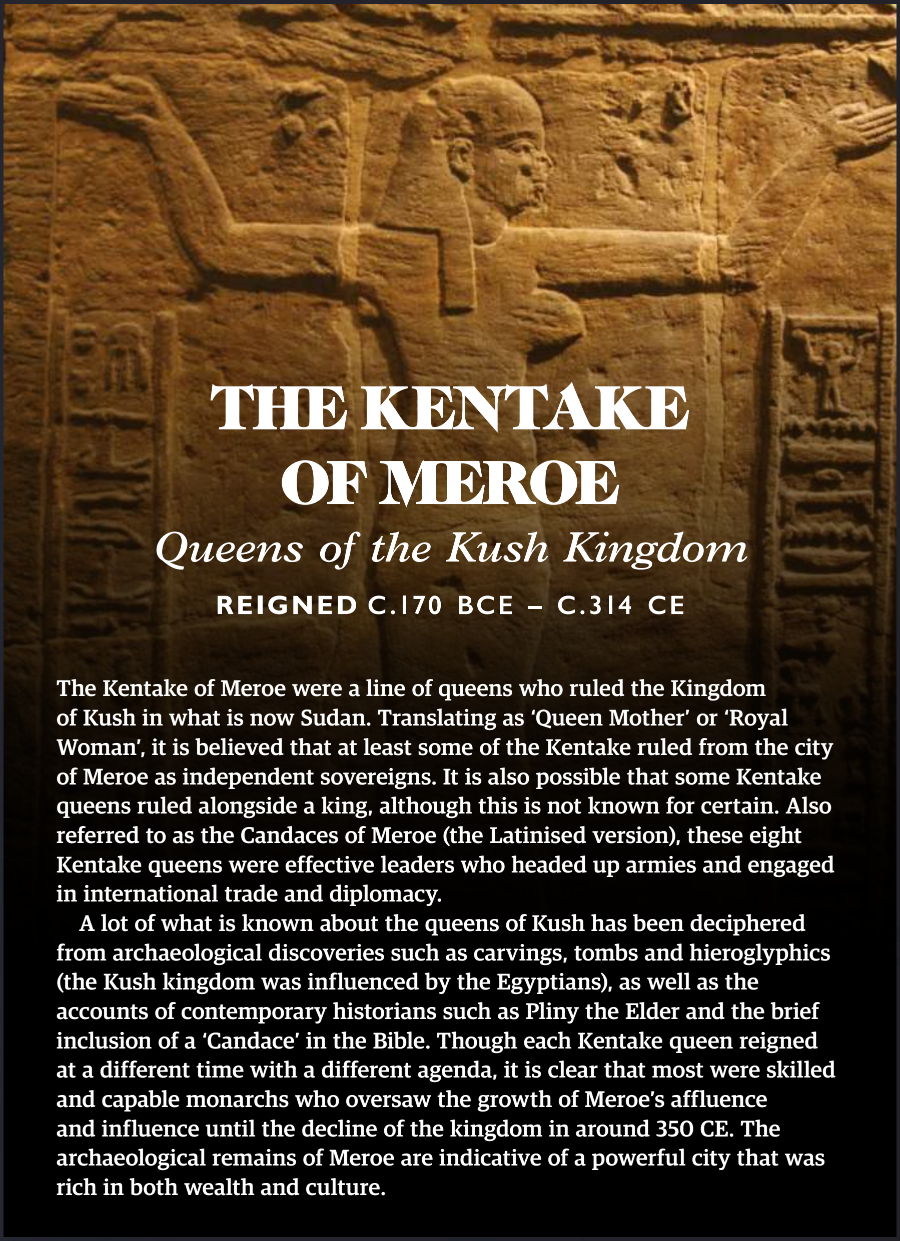


GREAT QUEENS OF AFRICA

The powerful royal women who helped Africa's historic states and kingdoms to flourish

WRITTEN BY EMILY STANIFORTH

Africa as a continent has a rich and diverse history which has often been overlooked by European scholars. From the ancient to the more recent, Africa has produced a wealth of strong and powerful women whose political capabilities and dedication to their people have strengthened nations. When looking to learn more about some of the great queens of African history, it is vital to remember that some information can be considered uncertain at best, especially when it concerns ancient and medieval figures. Throughout the world, a lot of early history is passed down via the medium of storytelling, artefacts and other art forms, as well as writing. History and folklore can often become intertwined. The mystical and religious mix with the historical and political to create histories that are passed down from generation to generation. Unpicking what is folklore and what is fact can be difficult, yet this absence of certainty when we look at powerful women from Africa's past only makes this subject more fascinating. Some of the queens featured here may not have even existed, while some of them definitely did. Either way, their presence in local, national and international histories has influenced different traditions and cultures, and contributed to the heritage of their states and kingdoms.



THE KENTAKE OF MEROE

Queens of the Kush Kingdom

REIGNED C.170 BCE – C.314 CE

The Kentake of Meroe were a line of queens who ruled the Kingdom of Kush in what is now Sudan. Translating as 'Queen Mother' or 'Royal Woman', it is believed that at least some of the Kentake ruled from the city of Meroe as independent sovereigns. It is also possible that some Kentake queens ruled alongside a king, although this is not known for certain. Also referred to as the Candaces of Meroe (the Latinised version), these eight Kentake queens were effective leaders who headed up armies and engaged in international trade and diplomacy.

A lot of what is known about the queens of Kush has been deciphered from archaeological discoveries such as carvings, tombs and hieroglyphics (the Kush kingdom was influenced by the Egyptians), as well as the accounts of contemporary historians such as Pliny the Elder and the brief inclusion of a 'Candace' in the Bible. Though each Kentake queen reigned at a different time with a different agenda, it is clear that most were skilled and capable monarchs who oversaw the growth of Meroe's affluence and influence until the decline of the kingdom in around 350 CE. The archaeological remains of Meroe are indicative of a powerful city that was rich in both wealth and culture.

IDIA

Queen Mother of Benin

REIGNED C.1504 – ?

The kingdom of Benin, now in modern-day Nigeria, was in a state of civil war at the end of the 15th century after the death of Oba (king) Ozolua. The oba's two sons, Arhuaran and Esigie, took control of separate areas of the kingdom, ruling Udo and Benin City respectively. The civil war between them weakened Benin, and the neighbouring Igala people sent soldiers to try and take over the north of the kingdom. However, Esigie had someone extraordinary on his side: his mother Idia. The second wife of the oba, she was determined to see her son on the throne. With Idia's help, Esigie defeated his brother and saw off the Igala people, becoming the oba of Benin.

Esigie credited his victory to his mother's counsel and mystical knowledge, and Idia was proclaimed as the Iyoba (Queen Mother), a position created especially for her. Esigie also abolished the Benin custom of killing the oba's mother upon her son's succession to the throne. Instead, Idia was given her own palace, the Eguae-Iyoba, and effectively ruled alongside her son. She spent the rest of her life dedicated to helping him rule the Benin kingdom. Revered by the people of Benin as the first woman to go to war, an ivory carving of Idia's face has ensured that she is remembered as the first Iyoba. Upon her death, the Iyoba title passed to Esigie's favourite wife.

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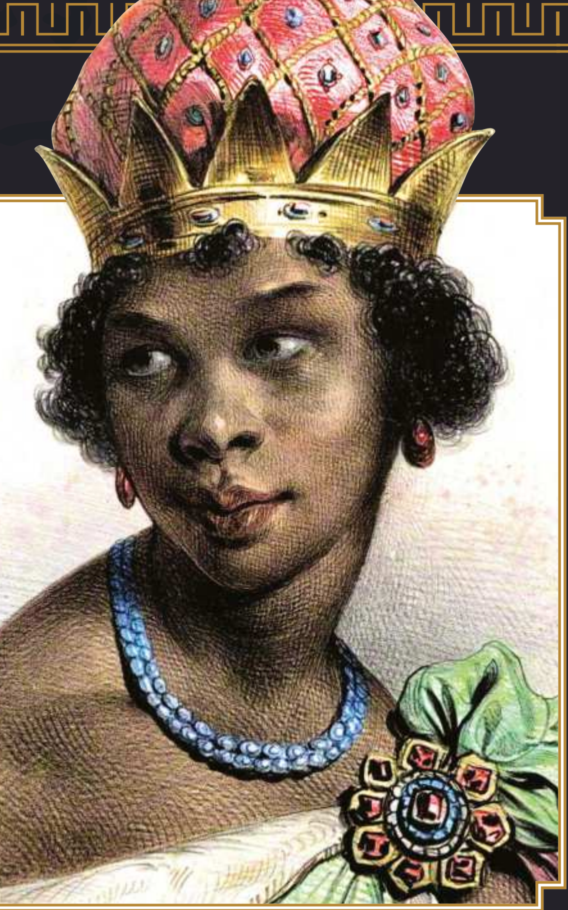


NZINGA MBANDE

Queen of Ndongo and Matamba

REIGNED C.1624-63

Queen Nzinga Mbande inherited the state of Ndongo (in present-day Angola) after the death of her brother, the king, around 1624. Populated by the Mbundu people, at the time of her accession Ndongo was facing threats from both Portuguese invaders and other neighbouring African states. To solve both problems simultaneously, Nzinga attempted to neutralise the Portuguese threat by positioning Ndongo as an intermediary state, allying with the Portuguese to end the seizing of Ndongo's people for slavery and to have the support of the Portuguese against other African invaders. She converted to Christianity, taking the name Ana de Souza to show her commitment to this partnership with Portugal. However, Portugal soon turned on Ndongo and Nzinga and her people were forced to flee, conquering the nearby kingdom of Matamba and settling there. After an unsuccessful attempt to regain control of Ndongo with the help of the Netherlands, where she personally led troops into battle, Nzinga focussed her attention on strengthening her power and the economy in Matamba. By the time of her death, Nzinga had established Matamba as a commercial state that operated as an equal of the Portuguese colonies. She also re-converted to Christianity before she died at the age of 81.

A group of Mino warriors, who were originally formed by Tassi Hangbe

TASSI HANGBE

Queen of the Dahomey Kingdom

REIGNED C.1705-08

A question mark hangs over the head of Tassi Hangbe, an 18th-century queen of the Dahomey Kingdom in what is now the country of Benin. Some historians are sceptical about whether she even existed; others, like Stanley B Alpern, suggest that our limited knowledge of Hangbe's life has arisen from a deliberate attempt to eradicate her from history. "The long silence on [Hangbe] may well have been due not to her non-existence but to a dynastic policy of suppressing her memory," says Alpern in his article *On the Origins of the Amazons of Dahomey.* Oral histories and material evidence point to the existence of Hangbe, who is believed to be the founder of the Mino warriors, a group of female soldiers who fiercely defended their kingdom. It is believed Hangbe was proclaimed Queen of Dahomey after the death of her twin brother, King Akaba, and to enforce her position as a woman on the throne she formed the female-only military regiment. The Mino, christened the Dahomey Amazons by Europeans who encountered them, acted chiefly as royal bodyguards and continued to do so for the subsequent kings of Dahomey after Hangbe was deposed. If Hangbe's successor King Agaja aimed to erase her from Dahomey history, he failed - her legacy survives in the proud tradition of the mighty Mino warriors, who continued to operate until the end of the 19th century.

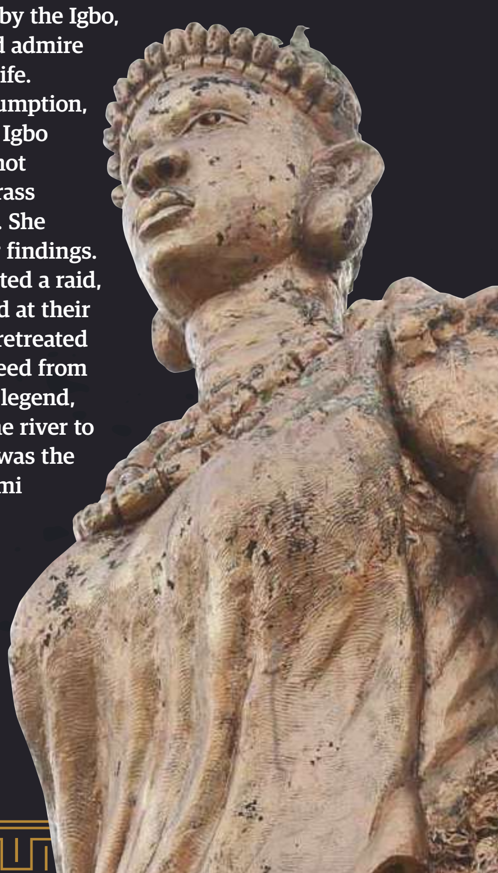
MOREMI AJASORO

Queen of Yoruba

REIGNED 12TH CENTURY

A queen of the Yoruba tribe, Moremi Ajasoro was a wife of the king of the city of Ife, in the south-west of present-day Nigeria. Estimated to have lived during the 12th century, Moremi and the people of Ife experienced regular raids by the neighbouring Igbo tribe, who the Yoruba referred to as "Forest People" because they believed them to be spirits. The Igbo tribe would raid Ife to abduct people for slavery. Having seen her people suffer, Moremi asked the spirit of the river to help her discover their weakness. Then, disguised as a trader, Moremi allowed herself to be captured by the Igbo, trusting that their leader would admire her beauty and make her his wife.

Moremi was right in her assumption, and integrated herself into the Igbo tribe, learning that they were not spirits but people dressed in grass and leaves to scare the Yoruba. She returned to Ife and relayed her findings. The next time the Igbo attempted a raid, torches were lit and brandished at their flammable clothing. The Igbo retreated and the Yoruba people were freed from their oppression. According to legend, Moremi went to the spirit of the river to learn that the price of its help was the sacrifice of her only son. Moremi pleaded for her son's life, to no avail, and she was left with no choice. Upon killing her son, the Yoruba people promised to be her eternal children. The Queen Moremi Statue of Liberty stands as a reminder of her sacrifice.



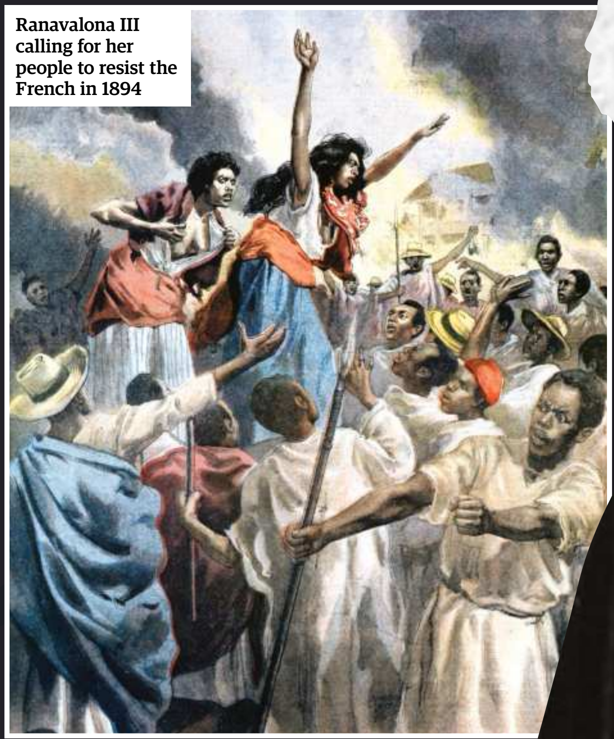
RANAVALONA III

Queen of Madagascar

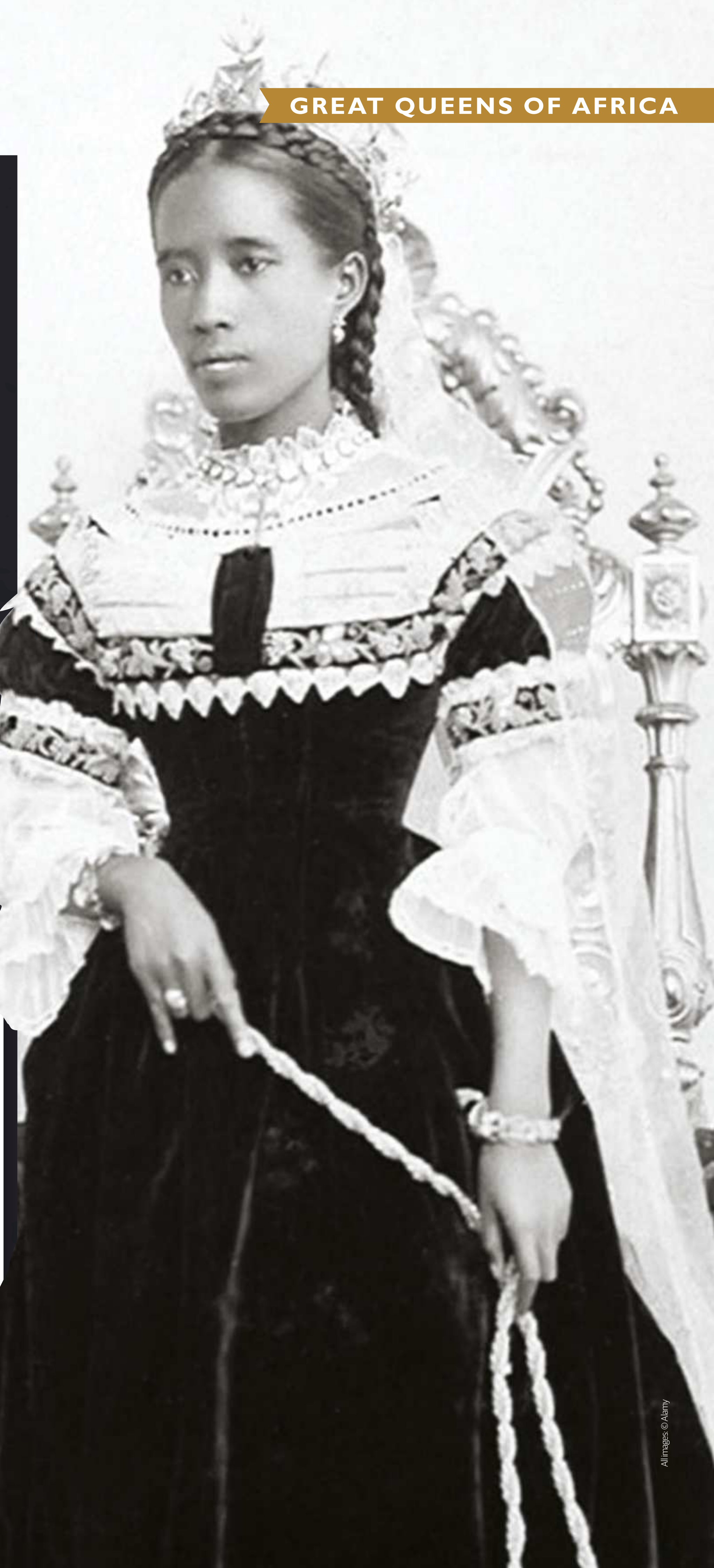
REIGNED 1883-97

As the favourite great-niece of Queen Ranavalona II, Princess Razafindrahety was made Queen of Madagascar, at the age of 22, upon the queen's death in 1883. She took the name of her predecessors, becoming Ranavalona III, during Madagascar's transition from being governed by absolute rule to a constitutional monarchy. Widowed shortly before her accession, Ranavalona married the prime minister of Madagascar, Rainilaiarivony, who had also been married to the two previous queens. He was a lot older than the young Ranavalona and there was speculation that Rainilaiarivony was responsible for the death of Ranavalona's first husband.

Despite her youth and largely ceremonial position as queen, Ranavalona took an active role in governance, focussing on retaining Madagascar's independence from the threat of French colonisation. She ensured she was a recognisable and friendly figure to her people, taking part in public engagements and visits to hospitals and schools. However, her efforts could not hold off the French, and in 1895 she was forced to hand over the capital, Tananarive. Ranavalona, along with her family, was exiled to the island of Reunion in 1897 because the French feared her presence could inspire an uprising of the Madasgacan people. After two years she was sent to Algiers, where she lived a comfortable life until she died of an embolism in 1917. Ranavalona was never permitted to return to Madagascar, though her remains were eventually returned to the island, where she is now buried.



Ranavalona III calling for her people to resist the French in 1894



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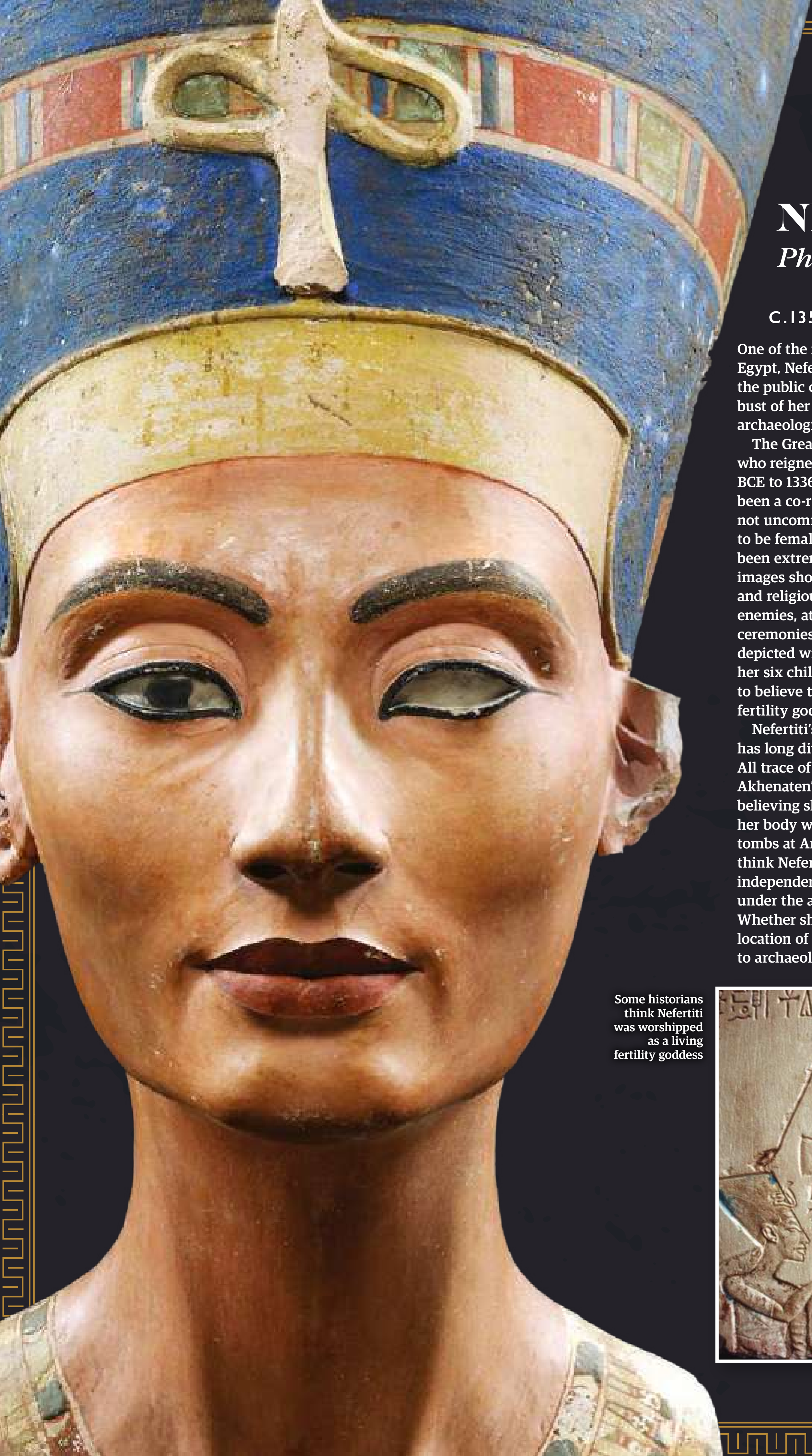


NEFERTITI

Pharaoh of Egypt

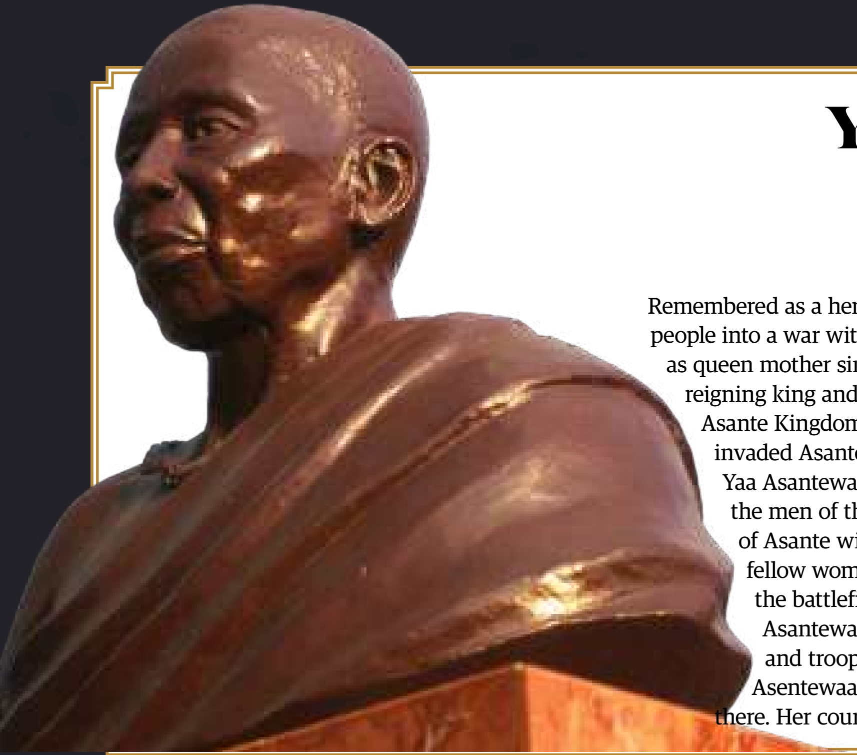
REIGNED
C.1353 BCE – C.1330 BCE

One of the most recognisable faces of Ancient Egypt, Nefertiti was only reintroduced to the public consciousness in 1912 when a bust of her was discovered by a German archaeologist and put on display in Berlin.

The Great Royal Wife of King Akhenaten, who reigned as pharaoh from around 1353 BCE to 1336 BCE, Nefertiti appears to have been a co-ruler with her husband. It was not uncommon for Egyptian pharaohs to be female, but Nefertiti seems to have been extremely influential. Contemporary images show her in positions of political and religious power, such as driving away enemies, at the reins of chariots, and leading ceremonies of worship. She is also often depicted with accentuated curves alongside her six children, leading some historians to believe that she was considered a living fertility goddess.

Nefertiti's disappearance from history has long divided opinion among historians. All trace of her seems to vanish during Akhenaten's 12th year of rule, with some believing she must have died. However, her body was not found in the royal tombs at Amarna in Upper Egypt. Others think Nefertiti may have ruled Egypt independently after her husband's death under the alternative name Smenkhkare. Whether she died or became pharaoh, the location of Nefertiti's tomb remains a mystery to archaeologists.

Some historians think Nefertiti was worshipped as a living fertility goddess



YAA ASANTEWAA

Queen Mother of Asante

REIGNED C.1880s – C.1901

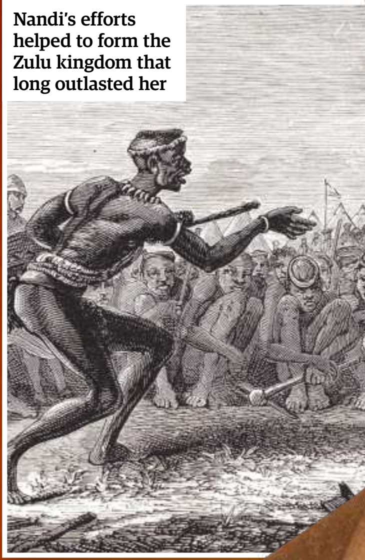
Remembered as a hero of the Asante kingdom, in modern-day Ghana, Yaa Asantewaa led her people into a war with British colonial forces who threatened their independence. Having acted as queen mother since the reign of her brother, Yaa Asantewaa was the main advisor to the reigning king and, most importantly, the custodian of the Golden Stool – the emblem of the Asante Kingdom, symbolic of the power and authority over its people. When British troops invaded Asante in 1886 and exiled King Prempeh I and other leaders to the Seychelles, Yaa Asantewaa sought to protect the Golden Stool. Having seen little enthusiasm from the men of the kingdom to go to war, she took charge, proclaiming: "If you the men of Asante will not go forward, then we will. We the women will. I shall call upon my fellow women. We will fight the white men. We will fight until the last of us falls in the battlefields." Leading her army of women and newly inspired men into battle, Yaa Asantewaa was more than a match for the British forces. However, extra resources and troops supplied to the British resulted in a defeat for the Asante kingdom. Yaa Asentewaa was captured and exiled to the Seychelles, living out the rest of her days there. Her courage and determination have ensured her legacy as an almighty queen.

NANDI

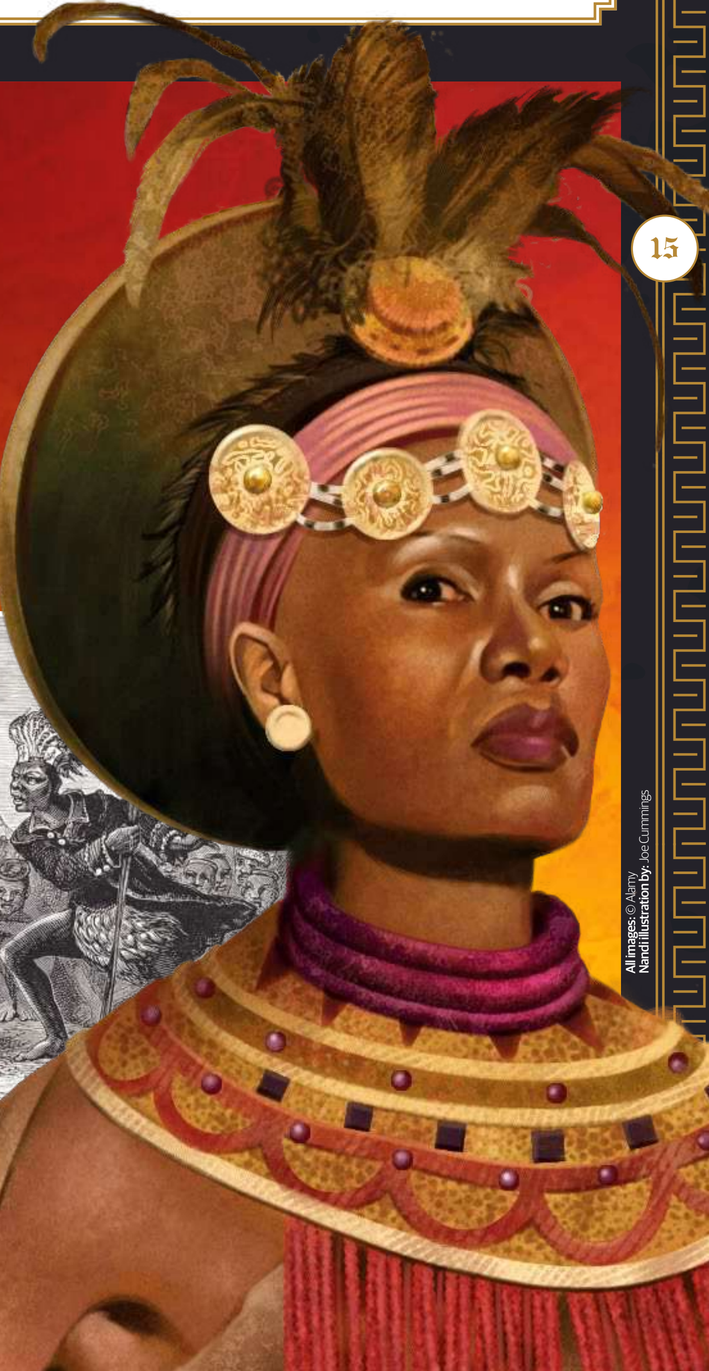
Queen Mother of the Zulu Kingdom

REIGNED C.1816-27

Nandi was born into the Langeni tribe in what is now South Africa. Much of what is known about her life has been recorded in oral histories, with a few written sources from people who encountered her also providing information. As a young woman, Nandi is said to have engaged in an illicit relationship with Senzangakhona, the chief of the Zulu kingdom in Southern Africa. The relationship was controversial, not only because the pair were not married, but also because Nandi and Senzangakhona were considered to be too closely related to each other. As a result of their affair, Nandi became pregnant and gave birth to a son she named Shaka. Once Shaka was born, Senzangakhona married Nandi, and she and her son became part of the Zulu royal family, with Nandi holding the lowly position as the chief's third wife. During this time, Nandi gave birth to a second child, this time a daughter. With a reputation for being bad-tempered and difficult, Nandi and her children never felt welcomed in the Zulu kingdom and so left, taking refuge with the Mthethwa people. There Shaka, encouraged by his mother and the Mthethwa chief Dingiswayo, rose through the ranks and became a skilled warrior. Upon the death of Senzangakhona in 1815, Shaka returned to take the chieftainship of Zulu by force from his elder brother. He was also named as the successor of Dingiswayo before his assassination in 1817. As chief, Shaka helped the Zulu kingdom to thrive. Nandi, as mother of the chief, held an incredibly influential position, acting as an advisor to her son. When she died in 1827, she was given a funeral fit for a queen and Shaka enforced a period of public mourning. Her resilience and determination to provide for her son, despite the hardships she went through, have seen her revered as a great figure of the Zulu kingdom.



Nandi's efforts helped to form the Zulu kingdom that long outlasted her



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Nandi illustration by: Joe Cummings

51 – 30 BCE

CLEOPATRA

How the middle daughter of a despised pharaoh fought, schemed and seduced her way to becoming the most famous Egyptian ruler of all

Egypt was in turmoil. In 81 BCE Ptolemy IX, the pharaoh who had dared to melt down the gold coffin of Alexander the Great, was dead. A series of bloody and violent family feuds had robbed his dynasty of any legitimate male heirs, so his popular and beloved daughter, Bernice III became queen. Following the family tradition, she married her half-brother, Ptolemy XI, but just 19 days after the ceremony, the groom had his new bride murdered and claimed the throne as his own. The citizens of Alexandria were furious, and an angry mob quickly seized the new pharaoh and lynched him. This left Egypt leaderless and seemingly out of control.

As the commander of the army and the personification of god on Earth, a pharaoh's presence was essential to prevent mass unrest in Egypt and anyone was better than no pharaoh at all. The throne was offered to the illegitimate sons of Ptolemy IX, and Ptolemy XII stepped forward to claim it. A notorious womanizer with a fondness for drink and excess, he was hardly the shining beacon the struggling country needed to guide it through the darkness of the pit it had fallen into. A nickname for the illegitimate pharaoh quickly became popular - Nothos, or 'the bastard.' Ptolemy XII had at least five legitimate children, and Cleopatra VII was the second oldest after her sister, Berenice IV.

The young princess was clever and quick-witted, with an eager and curious mind driven by a near-insatiable thirst for knowledge. She easily excelled at her studies and even her esteemed scholars were amazed by her aptitude for languages, readily conversing with any foreign visitors whether they were Ethiopians, Hebrews, Troglodytes, Arabs, Syrians, Medes or Parthians. Yet, outside her palace, the kingdom was being stretched at the seams, in danger of being ripped apart.

Ptolemy XII was in a troublesome position. His father had promised Egypt to Rome, a promise the Roman Senate had chosen not to act on yet. Still, Ptolemy XII was smart enough to understand that to keep the Romans happy was to ensure Egypt's survival. He sent masses of money and bribes to Julius Caesar (at that time one of Rome's most important figures), which secured the Romans' support but dammed him in the eyes of his tax-burdened citizens. In 58 BCE he was forced into exile, taking his talented younger daughter with him. When he returned three years later, with the backing of a Roman army courtesy of the statesman Aulus Gabinius, he discovered his oldest daughter Berenice sitting on the throne. Displaying the brutal ferocity that ran through his entire family, he had his daughter summarily executed. He reclaimed the throne, from which he ruled until he died in 51 BCE. The crown and all the debts he had amassed became the property of his oldest surviving daughter, Cleopatra.

The 18-year-old was not - as some expected - a naïve, wide-eyed child torn from her books to rule a kingdom on the brink of war. She had served as consort to her father for the final few years of his reign and all her education since birth had been designed to mould her into a capable queen. Queen, that was; not king, not pharaoh. Cleopatra was cursed by the requirement of all Egyptian queens to serve alongside a dominant male co-ruler and so found herself burdened with the task of being a subordinate co-regent to her ten-year-old brother, Ptolemy XIII.

Faced with a regency council full of ambitious men who ruled in her brother's stead and led by her own ruthless, impatient and intelligent nature, Cleopatra pushed her brother-husband into the

▶

“The young princess was clever and quick-witted, with a curious mind”

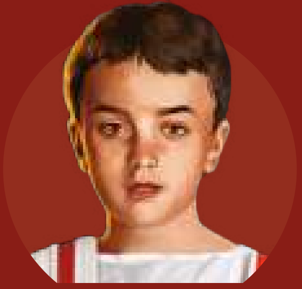
Illustration by: Joe Cummings

background and established herself as the sole monarch of the country. This was dangerous; the Alexandrian courtiers swarmed over the young, impressionable king, filling his head with whispers of sole rule and the dangers of his older sister. If Cleopatra had been more patient and attentive, she could perhaps have trained a capable and obedient co-ruler in him, one who would have aided her rule, instead of bringing it crashing down. But that was simply not the Ptolemy way, and she was a Ptolemy in every sense of the word - daring, ambitious and deadly. She dropped her brother's image from coins and erased his name from official documents. With her skill, drive and cunning she was perfect for rule; in her mind, she deserved Egypt and wasn't prepared to share it.

The early years of her reign would be testing, as the country struggled under her father's debts, and years of infrequent floods of the Nile had led to widespread famine. Cleopatra could feel the ever-looming and rapidly expanding threat of Rome, and with a weak Egyptian army, her fertile land was ripe for the picking. As hungry peasants flooded into the cities, Cleopatra's popularity plummeted, and her repeated decisions that seemed designed to please Rome at Egypt's expense reminded the bitter population of her despised father.

In the middle of this political turmoil, Cleopatra's brother returned. Aided by his many guardians and regents, he was now a vicious and ruthless king who was not afraid to wipe her from the land and from history. He completely erased his sister's name from all official documents and backdated his monarchy, claiming sole rule since his father's death. With her popularity and reputation already in tatters, the disgraced queen fled the city before an angry mob could storm the palace and inflict upon her the same grisly fate as so many of her greedy and ill-fated predecessors.

A husband & two lovers



PTOLEMY XIII THEOS PHILOPATOR

Macedonian, 62-47 BCE

How did they get together?
The marriage between Ptolemy and his sister was arranged, as was the tradition with Egyptian royalty.

Was it true love?
Considering their joint rule erupted into a brutal civil war, we can assume there was little love lost between the siblings. There is no evidence they consummated their marriage.

How did it end?
Ptolemy was forced to flee Alexandria when the forces of Caesar and his sister-wife Cleopatra claimed victory. He reportedly drowned attempting to cross the Nile when fleeing.

JULIUS CAESAR

Roman, 100-44 BCE

How did they get together?
Cleopatra and her brother both needed Caesar's support. Cleopatra met with Caesar before their scheduled meeting and managed to sway his vote. Her methods can be left to the imagination.

Was it true love?
Although the union was initially spawned from mutual political gain and the two were forbidden by Roman law to marry, Cleopatra seemed to stay loyal to Caesar and had his child.

How did it end?
This love affair was cut short when Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March.

MARK ANTONY

Roman, 83-30 BCE

How did they get together?
Antony summoned Cleopatra to see if she would hold true to her promised support during the war against the Parthians. She reportedly charmed him during this meeting, perhaps much the same way she had Caesar.

Was it true love?
Although it may have been borne out of political agendas, the two had three children together, and Antony risked everything to be with his Egyptian queen.

How did it end?
After the ill-fated Battle of Actium, Antony committed suicide upon mistakenly hearing Cleopatra was dead, and she quickly followed suit.

Having lost the support of her people and the land she so strongly believed was hers to rule, Cleopatra escaped to Syria with a small band of loyal supporters. Fuelled by outrage at her brother, and at the advisors who had crafted him into a vicious enemy, Cleopatra did not abandon her ambitions, but set about building the army she needed to reclaim her throne.

As she amassed her forces in Syria, her young brother, barely 13 years old, became distracted by the ever-pressing Roman civil war. After a humiliating defeat to Caesar in Pharsalus, the Roman military leader Pompey the Great fled to the one place he was assured he could find refuge; his old ally, Egypt. With his wife and children watching nervously from afar, Pompey disembarked his grand ship to board a small fishing boat to the shore. Ptolemy sat on the shore on a throne fashioned specifically for the occasion. He watched Pompey closely, his face unreadable, but the men around him threw their arms open and cried, "Hail, commander!" It was not until the ship reached the shore that Pompey realised the danger he was in. Before he could cry out he was run through with a sword and stabbed repeatedly in the back. While the consul was decapitated and his mutilated corpse was thrown into the sea, Ptolemy did not rise from his throne. The ceremony had been a ruse; a rival of Caesar's was more valuable dead than alive.

When Caesar arrived in the harbour of Alexandria four days later, he was presented with the head of his rival. However, the Roman general was completely appalled. He wept loudly before leading his forces to the royal palace in Alexandria. Observing the local resentment and civil war threatening to break the land in two he made a decision; he needed the wealth that Alexandrian taxes would give him, and the only way of increasing taxes was to establish stability in the city. The sibling rivalry had to end. He summoned Cleopatra and Ptolemy to appear before him. This was easy for Ptolemy who swiftly journeyed to Alexandria, but Cleopatra would have to use all her cunning just to make it into the city alive.

With the harbour blocked by her brother's ships, she slipped away from her troops and travelled in a small boat along the coast in the dead of night. Her journey had been utterly unfitting for a pharaoh of Egypt, a Ptolemy queen; but victory demanded sacrifice and she was confident the streets and waters she was being smuggled down would soon be hers again. It had been a challenge to make it into the palace district, but the real night's work was about to begin - she was about to go face-to-face with arguably the most powerful man in the known world.

Her brother would bend over backwards, slay Caesar's enemies and kiss his feet for his support, but he was quick to panic, eager to please and terrified of angering Rome. Her brother was a fool. Caesar needed Egypt as much as Egypt needed

Rome and she would use that fact to her advantage. She would not wait to bow and plead her case alongside a child, she was going to speak to the Roman general that night. She sneaked into the palace and managed to find her way into Caesar's private chamber.

Caesar towered over the small woman; Cleopatra would have to crane her head to look him in the eye, she realised instantly. He was far older than the young, bold Egyptian queen and his receding hairline was poorly disguised. The general was past his physical prime, but he had just won his greatest victory. This was her first time gazing upon the Roman celebrity known the world over, but this was also the first time he was facing her. Her brother was a child, a mere puppet pharaoh on strings, dancing to the pulls of his corrupt advisors, but she had been granted all the charm, intelligence and ambition of her forefathers. She would steal Caesar and Rome's support while her brother slept; her charisma would succeed where her brother's sword had failed.

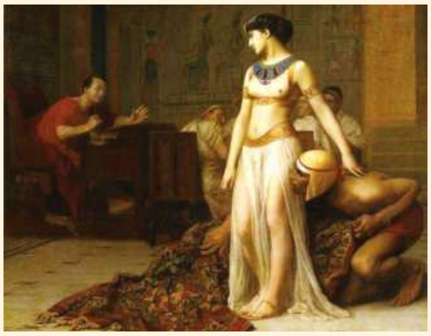
The young Ptolemy XIII awoke the next day, not expecting his dangerous older sister to have even made it to the palace. When he discovered that she was there and had seduced Caesar overnight into joining her cause, it was the final straw. Screaming in desperation, he fled from the palace, tore his crown from his head and fell to his knees. His sister had done it again. She was impossible to get rid of and, even as the crowd surged forward in protest, Caesar could not be swayed. The siblings would rule Egypt together, just as their father had intended. Rome had spoken.

The apparent peace did not last long. Ptolemy joined with his rebellious sister Arsinoe IV. They amassed an army large enough to challenge Cleopatra and Caesar's forces in Egypt. In December 48 BCE, the famous stone city of Alexandria was set alight, destroying the lives of hundreds of citizens and the world-famous library that housed countless priceless manuscripts. When Caesar's reinforcements poured into the city from Pergamum, Ptolemy's forces were finally defeated. The young and impetuous king tried to flee across the Nile in an overcrowded boat, but his vessel sank, dragging him and his elaborate, heavy golden armour down with it.

One Ptolemy was dead, but another still lived. Ptolemy XIV, Cleopatra's 13-year-old brother, became her husband and co-ruler immediately. She had Caesar's support but tradition remained and a lone woman could not rule Egypt. As for Caesar, he had put in place a reliable partnership and Egypt was, for all intents and purposes, a Roman territory. In a lavish display of the new union, a fleet of Roman and Egyptian ships sailed down the Nile accompanied by the grand royal barge where Cleopatra and Caesar sat together.

Egypt and Rome were united, but Cleopatra still found herself co-ruler to another Ptolemy who would inevitably grow up to be ambitious and treacherous. As long as Ptolemy XIV lived, her rule was threatened. She wasn't a fool, she knew Egypt would never accept a solitary female queen, but there was a technicality that would ensure her effective sole rule. Her partnership with Caesar had provided more than his political support; she was pregnant and in 47 BCE she gave birth to a boy. She named him Caesarion, or 'Little Caesar', and now had an heir. For three years Cleopatra tightened her grip on the Egyptian throne, slowly winning over the Alexandrian mobs that had previously screamed for her head. She travelled to Rome with her son and resided in Caesar's country house as heated rumours about the paternity of her son swirled. She did little to squash them; a possible heir of Caesar was a very powerful tool to have.

When Caesar was assassinated on 15 March 44 BCE, Cleopatra left Rome and returned to Alexandria. Without her powerful Roman lover, she needed an ally who could assure her rule, one who wasn't going to lead a rebellion against her. Later that year the youngest Ptolemy was found dead, seemingly poisoned and the young Caesarion replaced him. Cleopatra had finally done it, she was Egypt's pharaoh, and with her son an infant, she was ruling alone in all but name. The power of Egypt was hers. ◆



Five myths unravelled

SHE WAS SMUGGLED IN A RUG

The image of a dishevelled and flushed Cleopatra being unrolled from a Persian rug at Caesar's feet after being smuggled into the palace comes from the overzealous pen of Greek biographer Plutarch, but it's difficult to prove this happened. It seems unlikely that Caesar would have welcomed a suspicious package into his room and even if so, there's no reason for her not to have emerged earlier and made a more elegant entrance.

SHE WAS A FEMME FATALE

The idea that Cleopatra flittered between powerful men, with no clue who fathered her children, is the result of an ancient smear campaign run against her by Roman officials. There's only evidence of her having been with two men: Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

SHE WAS EGYPTIAN

One of the most famous Egyptian pharaohs of all time wasn't Egyptian – she was Greek. She was descended from Ptolemy, one of Alexander the Great's generals, and despite her family living in Egypt for over 300 years, she would have been seen as Greek. Cleopatra was actually rare in that she could speak Egyptian, unlike many of her predecessors.

SHE WORE A FAKE BEARD

The concept of female Egyptian queens sporting fake beards comes from the Egyptian belief that the god Osiris had a grand beard, prompting Egyptian pharaohs to do the same to establish themselves as divine beings. But by the time of Cleopatra this tradition had all but died out, and there's no record of her donning a fake beard. The only female pharaoh known to have worn one is Hatshepsut.

SHE DIED FROM AN ASP BITE

This myth has gained momentum due to paintings of Cleopatra holding a snake to her bosom as she passes away. However, the accounts of this event are in some doubt, mainly because an asp will not cause a quick death as Cleopatra's was reported to be. It is more likely she drank a combination of poisons. The idea that the asp bit her breast is certainly incorrect, as all ancient sources state it bit her on the arm.

LIVIA DRUSILLA

FIRST ROMAN EMPRESS

How one woman shaped a blueprint and legacy that would last for millennia

WRITTEN BY KATHARINE MARSH

If you stroll through the halls of the Museo Pio Clementino in Vatican City, you'll be surrounded by men. The marble busts boast strong Roman noses, and the full-length statues show the grandeur of Ancient Rome's elite ruling class. They're men - emperors, senators, consuls - who helped shape the republic and empire, creating the legacy we know today. But not all of them are men.

One of the white marble statues is a woman, portrayed with her hands up. Her hair is covered, and her stola covers her body. Most importantly, there's a reason her likeness is here. This is Livia Drusilla, and she has as much of a right to be there as her neighbours.

Livia's beginnings perhaps don't suggest what she was destined for. She was born in 58 or 59 BCE to a wealthy family; so wealthy that she married Tiberius Claudius Nero (remember those names for later), a member of the well-to-do Claudian clan. But in the dying days of the Roman Republic, Tiberius Nero chose his allies poorly, siding with the optimates opposite Julius Caesar, and then supporting Mark Antony when he fought at Philippi. Exile followed, and Livia went with him and their son, Tiberius, to Greece in 39 BCE.

Just one or two years later, Livia fell pregnant again, but her husband never got to see the newborn. The 30s were a tumultuous time in the Mediterranean; the Republic was in its final days, with a young upstart, Octavian, vying for control. A member of the Julian clan and the adopted son of Julius Caesar, he was a strong contender for leader of Rome. And he was recently divorced; his second wife, Scribonia, who had given him a daughter, had become tiresome to him.

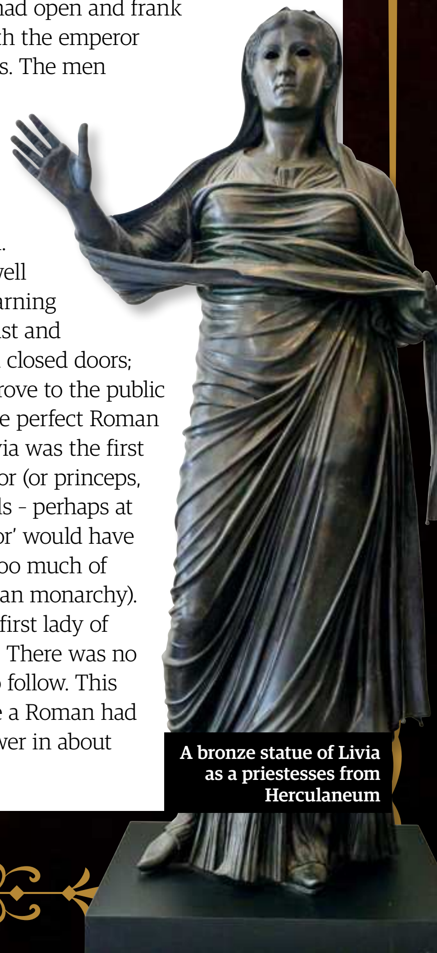
Octavian's sights were set on Livia. She was beautiful, dignified and intelligent, and embodied the republican ideals of what a woman should be. It didn't hurt that she was now associated with the Claudians, either. But while she didn't provide her second husband with a son, it didn't matter. Livia already had a son, and now she could make him emperor.

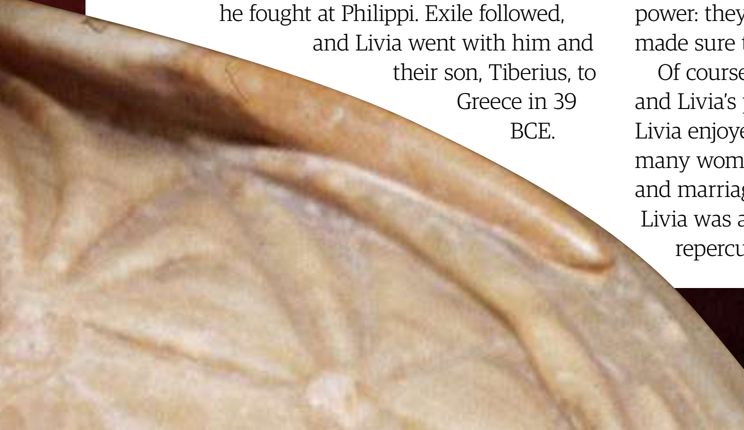
To do that, she needed power, and that wasn't something Roman women enjoyed very often. Women were to be modest, quiet, dutiful and loyal, and were given few rights. There was no voting or standing for office, and hardly any would manage to run their own businesses. But in wealthy families, some women held another power: they had their husbands' ears. And Livia made sure the emperor trusted her completely.

Of course, we know little about Augustus and Livia's private life, but we know that Livia enjoyed a level of freedom that not many women at the time shared. Strict moral and marriage laws had to be followed, but Livia was able to circumvent these with no repercussions. At gladiator matches and other entertainment events, she sat at the front with the Vestal Virgins, the only other women who weren't relegated to the back of stadiums. She went out and about on her own - a rarity in the late Republic - and she enjoyed a certain amount of financial freedom.

Her step-grandson called her 'Ulixes stolatus' ('Ulysses [Odysseus] in a frock') for her sharp tongue, and she had open and frank conversations with the emperor discussing politics. The men in Augustus' inner circle knew Livia had influence over him; she wasn't one to be crossed.

But it was all well and good Livia earning her husband's trust and affections behind closed doors; they needed to prove to the public that they were the perfect Roman power couple. Livia was the first wife of an emperor (or princeps, first among equals - perhaps at that time 'emperor' would have smacked a little too much of the dreaded Roman monarchy). She was the first first lady of Rome, if you will. There was no precedent here to follow. This was the first time a Roman had held absolute power in about 500 years. ▶


A bronze statue of Livia as a priestesses from Herculaneum



Just one of the vineyards from which we now get Prosecco, an early version of which was a favourite of Livia's

Livia's elixir of life

KEEP CALM AND DRINK PROSECCO

The rolling hills of the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions in northern Italy have been home to winemakers for centuries. Although the name 'Prosecco' didn't necessarily exist before the 16th century, 'castellum nobile vinum Pucinum' did. But it wasn't just known as a fashionable drink.

In Ancient Rome, prosecco was a delicacy, and enjoyed by the upper classes. More than that though, it was thought to have been medicinal. Seen by some as an elixir that allowed the drinker to live a long life, a lengthy list of Romans drank it.

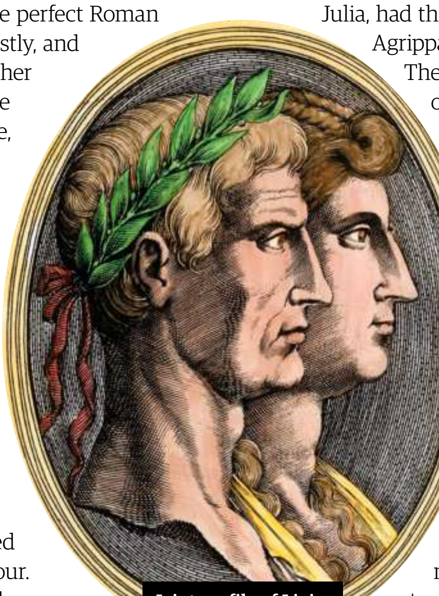
Among them was Livia, who actually credited it for allowing her to live well into her 80s. She enjoyed a glass a day for most of her adult life. Pliny the Elder was another who swore by it, and who knows how far past 55 he would have lived had he not been killed by his curiosity of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE.

Livia was presented as the perfect Roman matrona. She dressed modestly, and spun the cloth for hers and her husband's tunics herself. She kept a conservative hairstyle, and wore little jewellery. Everything about her could be traced back to the old Roman values of marriage, family and morality. She didn't appear on too many coins either – Augustus was the one in power, after all.

But she was still princeps Romana, the first lady of Rome. Statues of her were created, and she commissioned and dedicated public buildings to gain favour. She appears (we think) on the Ara Pacis, or Altar of Peace, both as herself and as a possible model for the goddess of fertility. Perhaps more significantly, the altar was dedicated on 30 January 9 BCE: her birthday. A major portico – the Porticus Liviae – was dedicated to her two years later, and Strabo claims in Geography that she was one of the major contributors to the beautification of Rome alongside her husband, his sister Octavia, and the general Agrippa.

Livia was established in her role; she was respected and she had influence in the burgeoning empire – she was even sometimes referred to as mater patriae, or mother of the nation. But if she wanted to truly cement her legacy, she needed the throne to pass to her son.

While Augustus had no sons, it didn't necessarily matter in Ancient Rome. Augustus wasn't Julius Caesar's son – he was adopted. The emperor could adopt any man or boy to be his heir, and there was no guarantee it would be Tiberius. Especially because Augustus' daughter, Julia, had three sons: Gais, Lucius and Agrippa Postumus. The real kicker? Their father was Marcus Agrippa, one of the emperor's friends and commanders. Gaius and Lucius were adopted by Augustus around 17 BCE (their younger brother was yet to be born).



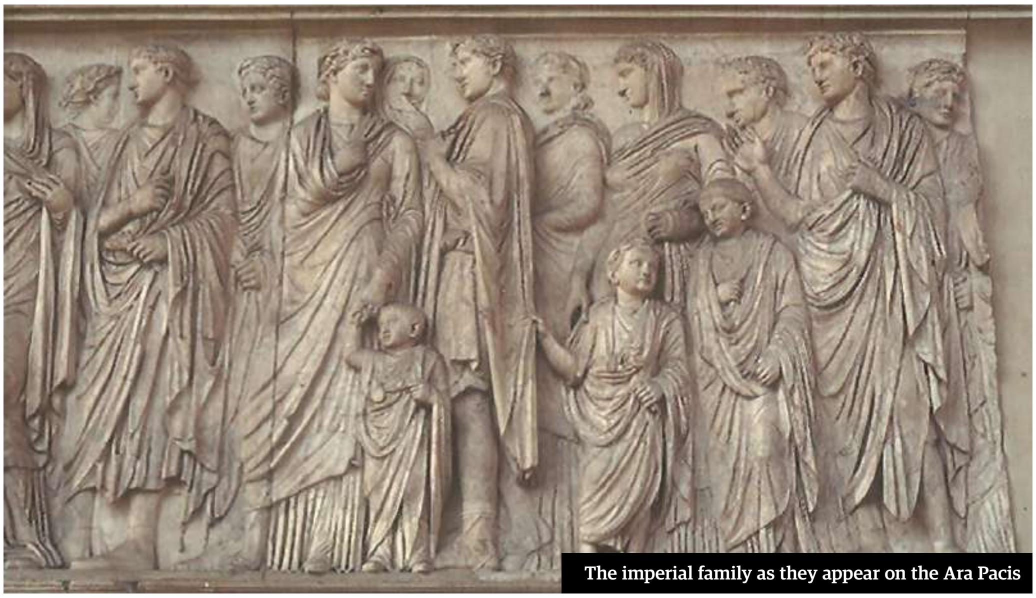
Joint profile of Livia and Augustus

However, all three boys met an untimely death. Some have questioned whether the empress had anything to do with their demises, but it's incredibly unlikely. Gaius was slain on the battlefield in 4 CE at the age of 23, while the middle brother, Lucius, would never live to see his 20s. Illness took him in 2 CE while he was in Gaul. Agrippa Postumus lived the longest and he was exiled at a young age, ultimately being executed after Augustus' death. As far as Livia was concerned, he wasn't a threat.

By all accounts, Tiberius was brought up as an heir. Born in 42 BCE, he was significantly older than his rivals, and given responsibilities as a result. In 6 BCE, he was given the power of a tribune, and was married to Augustus' daughter. Today we'd consider the relationship questionable, but in the early days of the empire it was a sign of Tiberius' power – and in 4 CE, he was adopted by Augustus.

Augustus was not happy about the situation, though. Tiberius later claimed that Augustus never really treated him well; the others were higher on his wishlist for a successor. When Tiberius tried to exile himself to Rhodes to escape the imperial family, the emperor declared it desertion. But Livia wanted her son to become princeps, and eventually brought him back into the fold.

Through all of this, Livia's marriage was going strong – or as strong as can be expected. Augustus

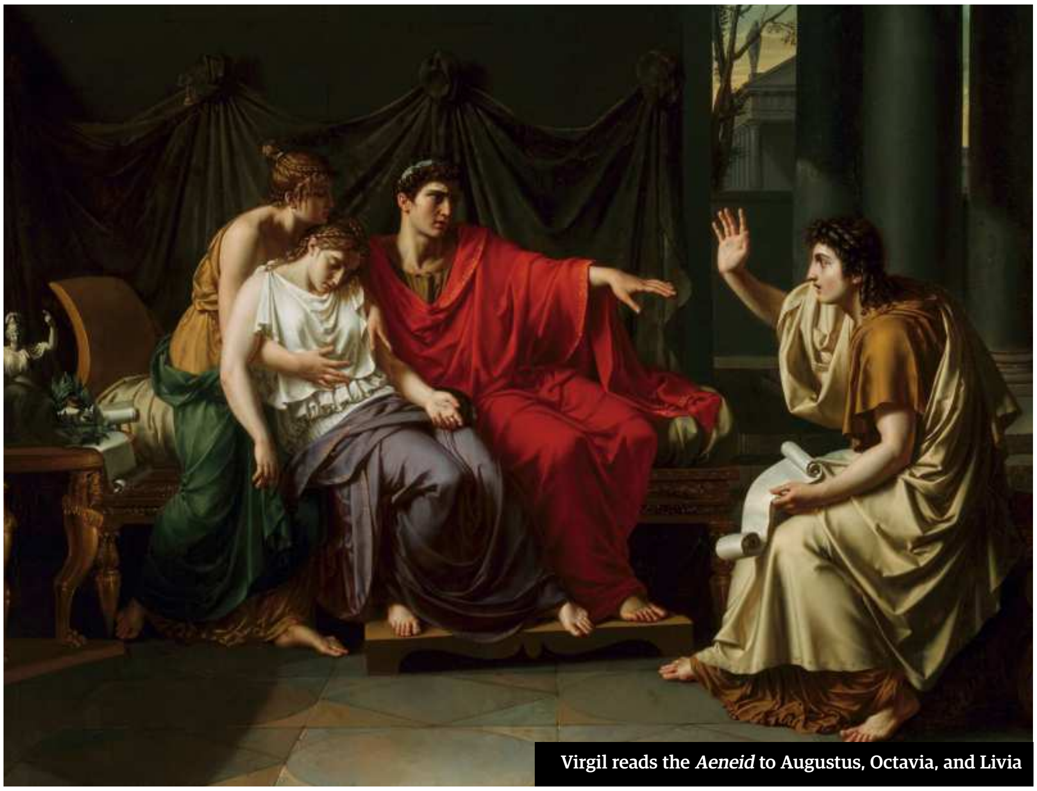


The imperial family as they appear on the Ara Pacis was notoriously unfaithful, but they remained a power couple, a dynamic duo. However, in the 10s CE, the emperor's health was failing. He became withdrawn but still communicated with his wife, primarily through letters. When he died in 14 CE, Livia was by his bedside in Nola.

But how did Augustus die? Some sources, both ancient and modern, suggest that his loving wife was behind it. A poisoned fig was apparently her weapon of choice. Some also think that she delayed the death announcement because Tiberius wasn't in Rome at the time; the death wasn't announced until the new emperor arrived at the house.

Augustus was dead but Livia's prestige didn't die alongside him. In the first emperor's will, he had adopted his wife (again, this wasn't too strange for the time), and she was given the name Julia Augusta. 'Augusta' would go on to become a honorific for empresses. But there was more - Augustus was deified, and Livia became a priestess of his cult. The one-third of his estate that she inherited was a nice bonus, too.

Most importantly, she was now the mother of the Mediterranean's most important man. Letters to the emperor were addressed to her as well, and she signed letters that Tiberius sent. In 20 CE, it became treasonous to speak out against her. When she recovered from a grave illness in 22 CE, thanksgiving offerings were made by the people.



Virgil reads the *Aeneid* to Augustus, Octavia, and Livia

> "She was sometimes referred to as mater patriae, or mother of the nation"

Livia wasn't one to let go of power. As time wore on, she became the ultimate overbearing mother. She interfered in her son's court, showing favour to politicians who Tiberius didn't necessarily like. She interfered in trials too, with Plancina, the wife and accused poisoner of Calpurnius Piso, being pardoned "by the request of [Tiberius'] mother".

But Tiberius wasn't his adoptive father; he didn't take kindly to this woman meddling and having influence above her station. This was where her narrative played directly into the hands of historians portraying her as a meddlesome and wicked woman. Tiberius was beginning to resent Livia's presence in Rome. As far as he was concerned, she wasn't a mater patriae, and she shouldn't be having honours bestowed on her left, right and centre. Worst of all, he was the emperor; he didn't want the annals to merely call him 'son of Livia', despite the petty irony of most simply referring to Livia as 'wife of Augustus' over the centuries.

An imperial Roman cameo of Livia with her son Tiberius when he was a child

Livia's ambition had earned Tiberius his position, and there's every reason to believe that it embarrassed him. He wanted distance between them and in 26 CE, he fled to the island of Capri. What he got up to there is a source of some debate, but we know that he only saw his mother once or twice more before her death.

Livia would live for another three years after her son's departure. In 29 CE, at the age of 86, she breathed her last. Tiberius wouldn't attend her funeral, but whether she knew it or not, her legacy was secured. A dynasty was made from her blood that would last until 68 CE with the suicide of Nero. Remember her first husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero? His names would be lent to three of the Julio-Claudian leaders, all thanks to his wife.

Her grandson Claudius turned her into a goddess in 42 CE. It was a first in Ancient Rome: a woman who had risen to become so powerful that she was deified. She was the wife, mother and grandmother of emperors by that point (she would later become the great-grandmother of an emperor, too). She had done everything to bring power to herself and her son, despite how Tiberius felt about it.

By today's standards, Livia was a feminist icon. In a patriarchal society, she found her way to the top and stayed there. She lived out her entire natural life without being assassinated and wielded control in her household and, to a certain extent, the empire. But that's not how history has remembered her.

Until relatively recently, women haven't held much power, simply because it was thought that they shouldn't. Depictions of Rome's first-ever, trendsetting empress have shown her as conniving, scheming and wicked. While she was revered for her pietas and morality, she was put down for her enjoyment of almost equal rights. Her influence exceeded what was appropriate for her gender in the eyes of many chroniclers over the centuries.

But the truth is that she was an icon. She paved the way for every empress of Ancient Rome, every first lady of the United States. With absolutely no precedent before her, she set the blueprint for behaviour, public image, and for those who married emperors after her. While Augustus may have found a city of bricks and left one of marble, Livia left a dynasty, the first Roman imperial house, and the defining role of the first lady for millennia to come. ◆

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Illustration by: Joe Cummings

c. Unknown – c. 60/61 CE

BOUDICA

BRITAIN'S WARRIOR QUEEN

Discover how her Iceni uprising almost crushed the Roman invasion

WRITTEN BY TOM GARNER

Sometime in the early 3rd century, the Roman historian Cassius Dio reflected on the mental state Emperor Nero in the year 60 CE. The notorious Nero, who had already ordered the murder of his mother, was now trying to present himself as a musical genius. His public performances were reputedly so bad that audiences openly laughed at him, but he had thousands of soldiers to lead rounds of applause. All this was reportedly done to "celebrate the shaving of his beard; and in behalf of his preservation and the continuance of his power".

This dangerously unstable ruler may have been mad but he held sway over the huge Roman Empire. Nevertheless, Dio recorded that Nero received a shock from the west on the far edges of his domains: "While this sort of child's play was going on in Rome, a terrible disaster occurred in Britain. Two cities were sacked, eighty thousand of the Romans and of their allies perished, and the island was lost to Rome. Moreover, all this ruin was brought upon the Romans by a woman, a fact which in itself caused them the greatest shame."

The woman who caused the Romans "the greatest shame" was Boudica, Queen of the Iceni. Although she was not Britain's first warrior queen, Boudica was the first British female ruler to be historically recorded in any detail - and her story was dramatic in the extreme. An epic tale of vengeance, destruction and bloodshed, Boudica almost ejected Roman forces from Britain in a great uprising during c.60-61 CE. Dio was wrong to state that Rome temporarily lost Britain to the rebellious Britons and their warrior queen but she definitely came closer than most. The question is: how close?

CLAUDIAN CONQUEST

In 60 CE, Britain had only been under Roman rule for 17 years since the invasion of Emperor Claudius in 43 CE. Apart from Ireland, this was the western limits of the known world for the Romans, and their actual rule was then limited to what is now central and southern England. In 60 CE an informal military frontier existed from Lincolnshire in the East Midlands down to Devon in the southwest, while the rest of Britain consisted of free Celtic tribes. Many occupied Britons initially welcomed Roman rule or capitulated without a fight, including the Iceni tribe.

The Iceni lived in what is now Norfolk and parts of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. They were already known to Julius Caesar when he invaded Britain in 54 BCE, when he referred to them as the "Ceni Magni" in his Commentaries. It's believed they were divided into several royal clans or subkingdoms, and one of their centres was a place near modern-day Norwich called Venta Icenorum ('Market of the ▶

The Snettisham Great Torc was discovered on former Iceni territory in Norfolk. Dating from c.150-50 BCE, it has been speculated that Boudica would've worn something similar

© Getty Images

Iceni'). They minted coins and made metalwork and fine jewellery, but were comparatively isolated and less wealthy than more southern British tribes.

Although they had initially peacefully submitted to the Romans in 43 CE, the Iceni subsequently launched a minor revolt in 50 CE. This event prompted the Romans to disarm the tribe and an uneasy relationship existed for the next decade. Despite the tension, one Iceni king called Prasutagus allied himself with the Romans and sought accommodation with them. When he died in c.60-61 CE he named both the Emperor Nero and his two daughters as his co-heirs.

> *"Although they had initially peacefully submitted to the Romans in 43 CE, the Iceni subsequently launched a minor revolt in 50 CE"*

According to the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus, Prasutagus believed that this "act of deference would place his kingdom and household beyond the risk of injury. The result was contrary - so much so that his kingdom was pillaged by centurions, his household made slaves; as though they had been prizes of war".

The Romans clearly took advantage of the power vacuum left by Prasutagus's death and his queen dramatically entered Tacitus's history as the victim of a craven assault: "As a beginning, his wife Boudica was subjected to the lash and his daughters violated: all the chief men of the Icenians were stripped of their family estates, and the relatives of the king were treated as slaves."

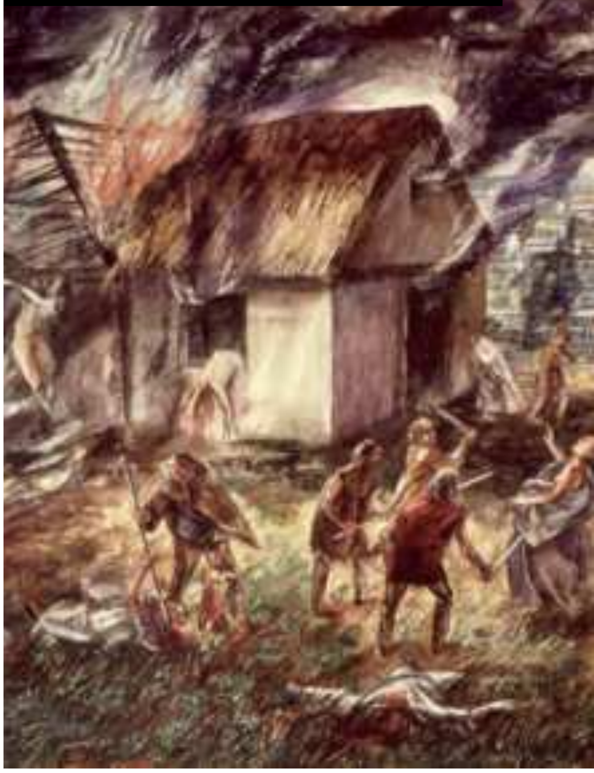
The Romans' severe ill-treatment of Boudica, her daughters and the Iceni nobility was to have grave consequences. Tacitus recorded that after these violations the Iceni rose up under Boudica's leadership and joined forces with neighbouring tribes to restore their freedom: "Impelled by this outrage and the dread of worse to come - for they had now been reduced to the status of a province - they flew to arms, and incited to rebellion the Trinovantes and others, who, not yet broken by servitude, had entered into a secret and treasonable compact to resume their independence."

Of the two Roman historians who chronicled what happened next - Tacitus and Cassius Dio - it is the former who is the most important. Dio was born approximately 100 years after the Boudican Revolt and was heavily influenced by Tacitus, although he may have had access to other sources that are now lost. The value of Tacitus is that his Annals were written half-a-century after the revolt and he was also the son-in-law of Gnaeus Julius Agricola, the governor of Britain. Agricola fought against Boudica as a junior officer in the Roman Army, so it is likely that Tacitus was told about events first-hand from someone who was there. Although he was biased against Boudica, Tacitus was, in his own words: "Dedicated to writing history without anger or bias." We can therefore view his history with a reasonable degree of accuracy, albeit alongside a significant dose of scepticism.

When it comes to Boudica herself, virtually nothing is known of her life before the events of c.60-61 CE. Dio said (with an unfortunate amount of sexism) that she was "a Briton woman of the royal family and possessed of greater intelligence than often belongs to women". He also described her appearance: "She was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, the glance of her eye most fierce; her voice harsh. A great mass of the tawniest (reddest) hair fell down to her hips. Around her neck was a large golden necklace, and she always wore a tunic of many colours over which a thick mantle was fastened with a brooch. This was her invariable attire."

Dio's image of a formidable warrior queen entirely chimed with her standing as the leader of a vengeful revolt. After her family's assault, she was now poised to lead the Iceni, Trinovantes and others against the symbol of Roman power in Britain: Colchester.

London was only a decade old when Boudica's forces burned it and massacred its earliest inhabitants



Iceni Icon

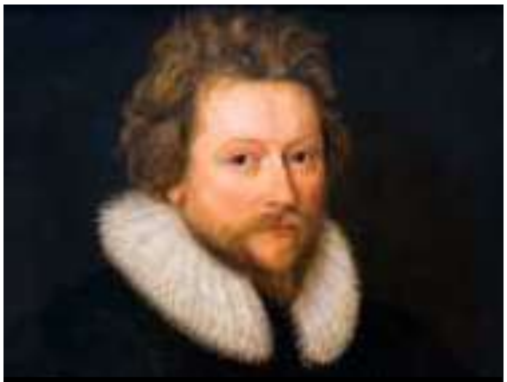
How Boudica's legend was built through literature, theatre, music, art and politics

Boudica has never been forgotten by the British. Her memory endured before her legacy was properly memorialised from the 16th century. The poet Sir Edmund Spenser called her "Bunduca" in a poem from 1590 called *Ruines of Time*. He praised her as a "victorious Conqueress" who overcame what he viewed as "Women's Weakness" to defeat the Romans.

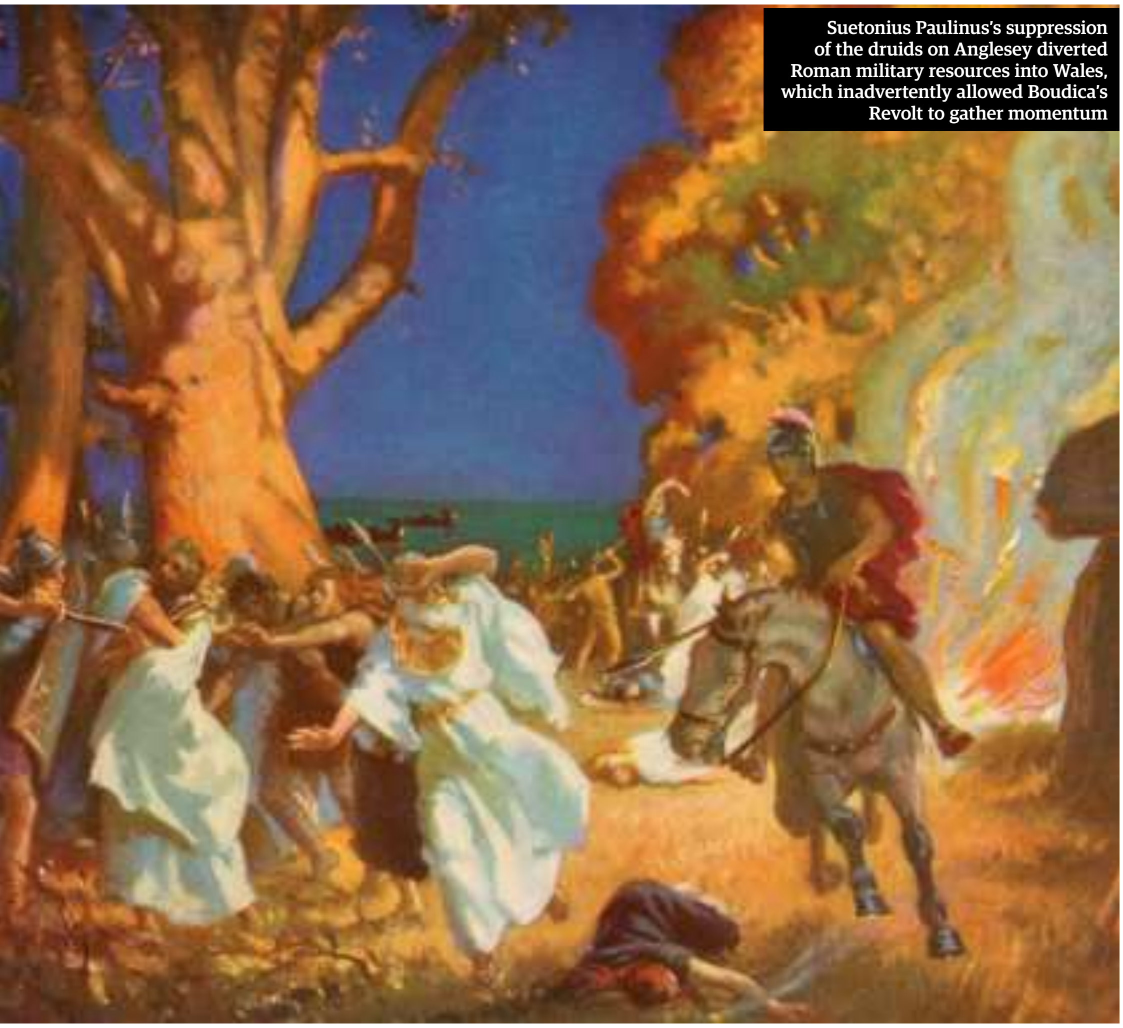
Sexism (not to mention historical inaccuracy) was also displayed by the Jacobean playwright John Fletcher in a play he wrote called *Bonduca* in 1613. Despite being the title character, Boudica is a secondary role compared to the male protagonist Caratach (Caratacus). To add insult to injury, she is depicted as unintelligent and arrogant. Boudica fared no better in John Milton's 1670 *History of Britain* where he claimed that the Britons were unruly barbarians who were led by a "distracted woman".

Boudica's posthumous fortunes only improved during the 18th and 19th centuries. A popular 1695 song by Henry Purcell called *Britons, Strike Home!* was based on Bonduca and became a patriotic tune that was sung during conflicts that included the Napoleonic Wars. For a woman who rebelled against imperial aggression, Boudica ironically became an iconic figure at the height of the British Empire. Several Royal Navy ships were named after her and Prince Albert encouraged the construction of her statue in Westminster in the 1850s.

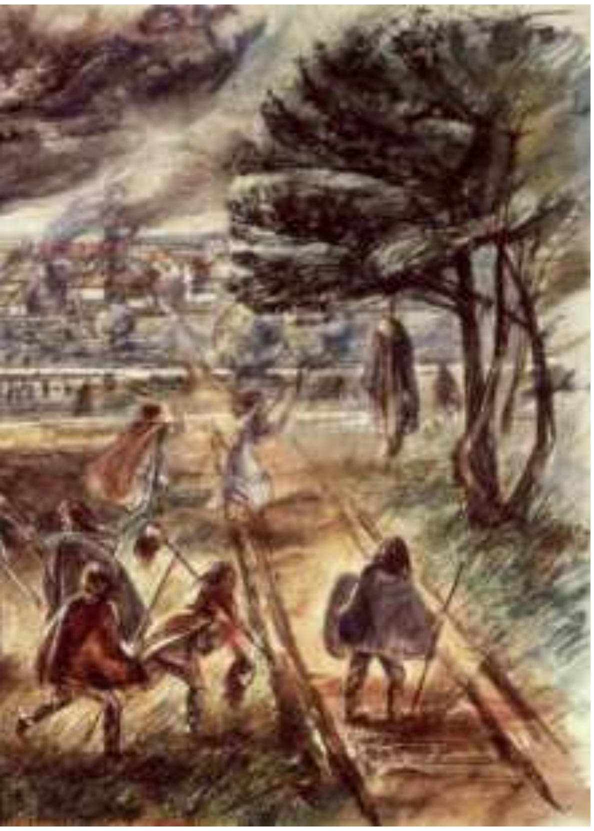
She also became a hero for the Suffragettes. A Suffragette pamphlet from 1909 explained how "this heroic figure… represents a type of the 'eternal feminine' – the guardian of the hearth, the avenger of its wrongs upon the defacer and the despoiler." It is an image that has endured well into the 21st century – regardless of the historical reality.



John Fletcher co-wrote several plays with William Shakespeare including *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*



Suetonius Paulinus's suppression of the druids on Anglesey diverted Roman military resources into Wales, which inadvertently allowed Boudica's Revolt to gather momentum



"CITADEL OF TYRANNY"

Located in what is now Essex, Colchester was known as Camulodunum by the Romans. It had been a significant British settlement but was occupied and became a prosperous town that was settled by Roman Army veterans and their native-born wives. Colchester was dominated by the Temple of Claudius, which was then the largest in Britain and included a bronze equestrian statue of the old emperor. Even Tacitus described Colchester as "a citadel of an eternal tyranny". However, it had no substantial defences.

When the revolt broke out, the main Roman military forces under the command of Governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus were far away fighting druids on the island of Anglesey off the northwest coast of Wales. Colchester's veterans hurriedly constructed defences around the temple but Boudica's new British force surrounded them and razed the town to the ground. The veterans received little support from Nero's procurator (representative) Catus Decianus and they endured a two-day siege inside the temple. They were ultimately "carried by storm" and massacred along with the rest of the town's population.

Colchester began a bloodthirsty trend for Boudica's revolt as the rebellious Britons destroyed all Roman forces and settlements that stood in their way. Chelmsford (Caesaromagus) was torched and a major victory was won by the Britons in an engagement known as the Battle of Camulodunum. A relief army of the 9th Legion commanded by Quintus Petillius Cerialis had attempted to relieve Colchester but according to Tacitus, "The victorious Britons routed the legion and slaughtered the infantry to a man."

Although Cerialis managed to escape, the damage to Roman prestige was enormous. His force had been a large vexillation (detachment) of 2,500 men, with approximately 2,000 being killed by the Britons. Boudica's victory at this unknown location in southeast England could be regarded as a miniature version of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE when Germanic tribes destroyed three Roman legions.

The Battle of Camulodunum forced Paulinus to personally return through enemy-held territory to assess the situation from the busy settlement of London (Londinium). With Colchester and a third of one of his legions destroyed, the future of Roman Britain was hanging in the balance all thanks to Boudica's uprising. Paulinus made the difficult decision to leave London to the mercy of the Britons and left to regroup his army in the north so that the Romans could defeat Boudica at a later date.

LONDON'S BURNING

London was only a decade old when Boudica's forces descended upon it. Already a successful commercial Roman port, it was (like Colchester) largely undefended and militarily vulnerable. Other British tribes had now swelled the ranks of Boudica's army and most of London's earliest inhabitants fled before the gathering storm.

The settlement was comprehensively destroyed in a firestorm and the Londoners who remained were reputedly subjected to excessive violence. Dio gave a lurid account of how the Britons committed, "bestial [atrocities]," by mutilating women, pillaging, committing sacrilege at Roman religious sites and conducting themselves with, "wanton behaviour."

Now, this may be a melodramatic interpretation but it is true that the sack of London was a traumatic event. Tacitus described how, "the enemy neither took captive nor sold into captivity; there was none of the other commerce of war; he was hasty with slaughter and the gibbet, with arson and the cross (crucifixion)."

Boudica moved on from London with her forces inflicting similar destruction on St Albans (Verulamium) in Hertfordshire. The Romans claimed that the Britons deliberately avoided enemy forts and garrisons and were primarily motivated by loot. The truth of this statement cannot be ascertained but this bitterly biased perspective fails to acknowledge that Boudica had inflicted a severe blow to Roman power in Britain. Tacitus admitted that the combined destruction of Colchester, London, St Albans and elsewhere caused the deaths of approximately 70,000 Roman citizens and their British allies. For a land ▶

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with a much smaller population than the United Kingdom today this was a catastrophic blow for the Romans. The triumphant Boudica now effectively controlled southeast Britain and only the army of Paulinus stood in her way.

A LOST BATTLEFIELD

British history hung on a knife-edge at this point between the ascendant Boudica and the embattled Paulinus who was licking Roman wounds to the north. The revolt had spread out from the southeast with Britons attacking Roman forces in places as disparate as Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Somerset. Even though Boudica's personal control over her own uprising is impossible to establish, she was clearly determined to directly meet Paulinus in battle.

In one sense, she had no choice. The Roman Empire was the greatest power in Europe and if their presence in Britain was not immediately removed then she would be defeated - either by Paulinus or by a later expedition. Boudica seemingly decided to meet Paulinus in battle quickly because the odds appeared in her favour.

The location of this fateful clash is unknown but historians believe it was fought somewhere along - or near to - an ancient highway known as Watling Street. Originally a British route that ran northwest from Dover in Kent to Wroxeter in Shropshire, Watling Street was paved by the Romans shortly after their invasion in 43 CE. It is supposed that Boudica followed Paulinus after he left London to rejoin his forces that were returning from Wales.

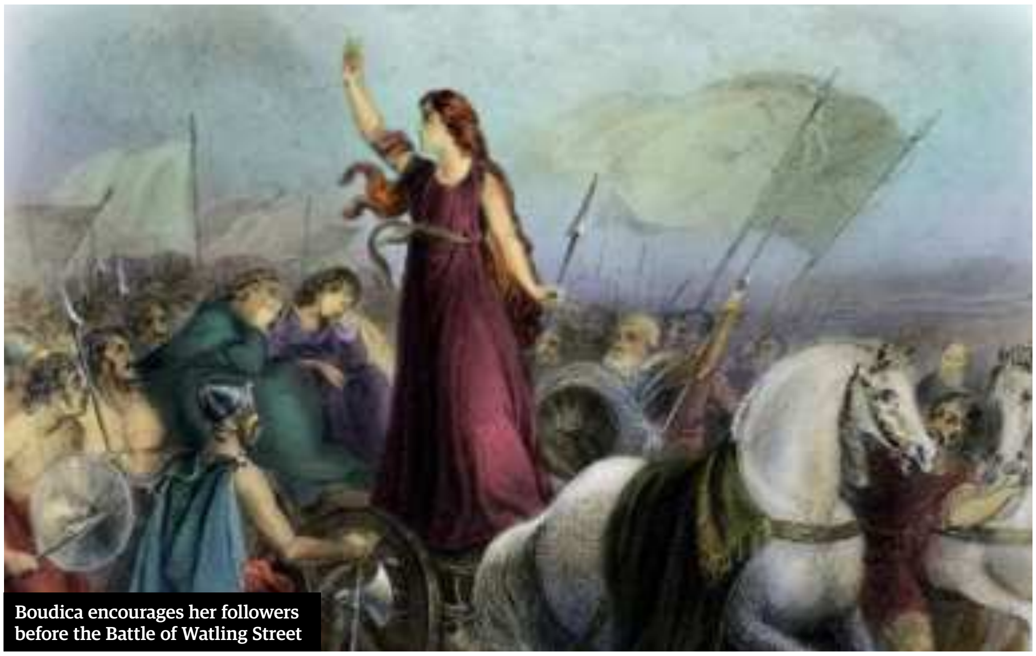
The opposing armies could have met anywhere along this road, with suggested sites being proposed in the Midlands or the northwest. One of the most intriguing locations, suggested by archaeologist Dr Graham Webster in the 1970s, is the village of Mancetter in Warwickshire. Tacitus described how Paulinus "chose a position approached by a narrow defile, closed in at the rear by a forest". This area also had an "open plain" that "extended without any danger from ambushes".

Mancetter is near to what was then the Roman military frontier and the village contains both woods and extensive fields that are still crossed by Watling Street. Archaeological evidence has uncovered a Roman Army base nearby as well as military coinage and the remains of legionary and cavalry armour. What is even more intriguing is a potential glimpse of the British military activities in the etymology of 'Mancetter' itself.

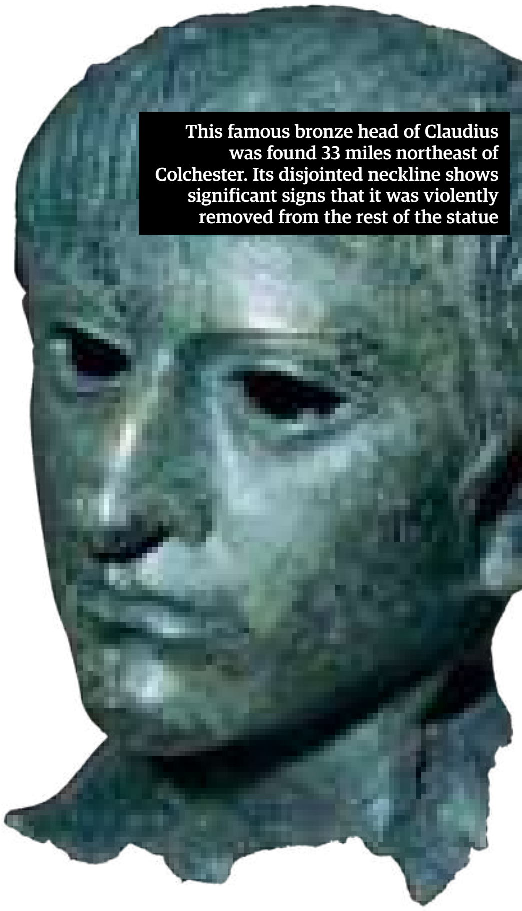
By the time the British and Roman armies met, Boudica commanded a numerically superior force. Tacitus said that the British were gathered "in unprecedented numbers", while Dio gave a figure of 230,000 warriors. This statistic is perhaps unlikely but the British certainly greatly outnumbered the Romans. Paulinus only commanded 10,000 men, which included the 14th Legion, a detachment of the 20th Legion and auxiliaries. These were fearful odds for a Roman force that was the last effective imperial presence in Britain.

Because the Britons had such a large army they were confident of victory and stationed their families in lines of carts in the rear of their forces.

"Boudica now effectively controlled southeast Britain and only the army of Paulinus stood in her way"



Boudica encourages her followers before the Battle of Watling Street



This famous bronze head of Claudius was found 33 miles northeast of Colchester. Its disjointed neckline shows significant signs that it was violently removed from the rest of the statue

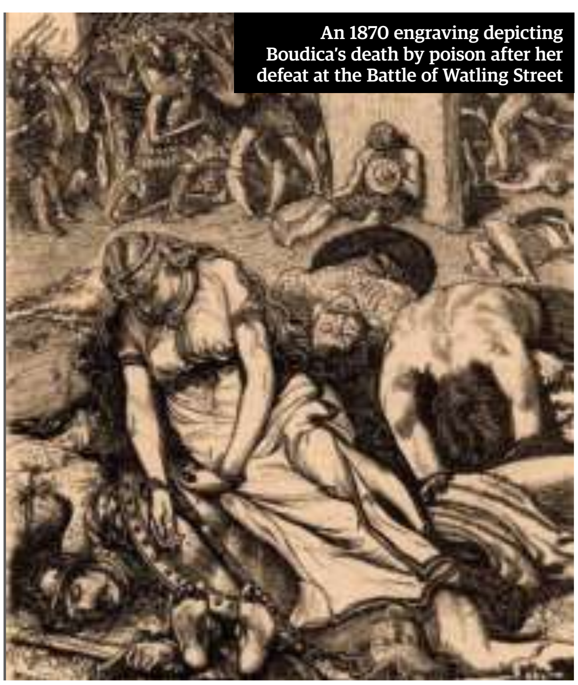
Mancetter was originally called Manduessedum, which translates as 'The Place of Chariots'. It is tantalisingly possible, but by no means certain, that the large number of chariots and carts in Boudica's army left a vivid folk memory that was reflected in the village's place name.

"CONQUER OR DIE"

No matter where the final battle was fought it was certainly decisive and recognised as such by both commanders beforehand. According to Tacitus, Boudica and her daughters rode before each tribe in a chariot and asserted that the Britons had fought under female leadership before. Tacitus then recorded Boudica delivering a fiery pre-battle speech where she declared: "It is not as a woman descended from noble ancestry, but as one of the people that I am avenging lost freedom, my scourged body, the outraged chastity of my daughters... If you weigh well the strength of the armies, and the causes of the war, you will see that in this battle you must conquer or die. This is a woman's resolve; as for men, they may live and be slaves."

Whether Boudica actually uttered these words cannot be known. However, it is possible that Tacitus, through the recollections of his father-in-law Agricola, perhaps recorded some of the real words of Paulinus to his soldiers. While Boudica's warriors chanted loud war cries, Paulinus gave a speech that focused on discipline and contempt for the enemy: "There, you see more women than warriors. Unwarlike, unarmed, they will give way the moment they have recognised the sword and courage of their conquerors... Close up the ranks, and having discharged your javelins, then with

This plain by the River Anker at Mancetter, Warwickshire, has been suggested as one of the potential battlefields for Boudica's final defeat by Suetonius Paulinus



An 1870 engraving depicting Boudica's death by poison after her defeat at the Battle of Watling Street

shields and swords continue the work of bloodshed and destruction, without a thought of plunder. When once the victory has been won, everything will be in your power."

The following battle saw the complete rout of Boudica's army. The Britons descended on the Roman lines but Paulinus ordered an attack. The legionaries threw two volleys of several thousand javelins before they advanced in a tight, wedge-shaped column. Using their large shields for defence, the legionaries also stabbed at the Britons as they moved forward with their short swords. The Roman auxiliaries deployed similar tactics while their cavalry used extended lances. The Britons, who were not as well armoured or disciplined as the Romans, were slaughtered and "turned back in flight". Their retreat "proved difficult, because the surrounding wagons had blocked retreat".

The Britons' huge numbers created a crush between the carts and the Romans who killed men, women, children and pack animals without mercy. Tacitus claimed that 80,000 Britons were killed compared to just 400 Romans and said of the battle: "Great glory, equal to that of our old victories, was won on that day."

Boudica's army and her hopes of ending Roman rule in Britain were destroyed. She died shortly afterwards although how, like much of her life, is uncertain. Tacitus said that she "put an end to her life by poison" while Dio claimed that Boudica "fell sick and died". The latter went on to state that: "The Britons mourned her deeply and gave her a costly burial; but, feeling that now at last they were really defeated, they scattered to their homes."

Dio's account of Britons' despondency fits with the Roman response to the revolt. Nero reinforced Paulinus's forces in Britain with thousands more legionaries, auxiliaries and cavalry, and hunted down any remaining resisting tribes with "fire and sword". The Britons were then hit by a famine because they had not sown crops during the revolt.

The heavy-handed Roman crackdown against British resistance indicates just how rattled they had been by the actions of Boudica and her followers. Even after the retribution and famine, the Britons were still defiant when one of Nero's courtiers, Polyclitus, was sent to head an enquiry into the revolt. Tacitus wrote that the Britons regarded Polyclitus as "a laughing stock, for they still retained some of the fire of liberty".

This undimmed fighting spirit was the main impact of Boudica's revolt and the fear she spread across the Roman Empire went right to the top. This previously obscure British queen had shaken imperial power to its very core, which was reflected 60 years later in an account of Nero's life by Roman historian Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus. In his account, Boudica had been such a threat that Nero "even thought of withdrawing the army from Britain". These few words explain why Boudica's story endures and is a remarkable reflection of how close she came to defeating the Roman Empire.

The Fenwick Treasure includes three gold armlets, various items of silverware, coins and even a small jewellery box containing gold earrings and finger-rings

Earth, Fire & Treasure

THERE IS ABUNDANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR BOUDICA'S REVOLT

Tracing historical figures and events from the Ancient World can be extremely difficult but there is plentiful archaeological evidence for Boudica's revolt, particularly in Colchester. It was discovered that the Britons desecrated the Roman cemetery and two tombstones of soldiers were found to have been deliberately damaged, with their faces symbolically mutilated. In 2014, Roman coins and jewellery were excavated in Colchester's High Street. Known as the 'Fenwick Treasure', the hoard was discovered beneath a soil layer of destruction dating from c.60-61 CE. It had been buried for safekeeping in a small pit under a house that had been burned down. Poignantly, the treasure was never recovered and human bones were also found on the site.

Colchester town centre also has a layer of red and black soil approximately one-metre thick dating from the time of the revolt. A similar layer exists beneath the modern City of London where the Britons also destroyed the Roman settlement. Both Colchester and London were razed to the ground, with the red layers being oxidised iron that melted during the fires. The red and black deposits of soil also represent the colours of clay that was used to build the timber structures. Such was the apparent destruction that the clays had turned into a solid mass. It is a stark indication that the Britons intended to totally destroy the new colonies, and fire-damaged coins depicting Emperor Claudius have also been found in London.

In 1907, a bronze head of Claudius was unearthed at Rendham, Suffolk. Discovered on what was once Iceni land, the head had formed part of a life-size statue but it was later decapitated. One theory is that the head was originally part of the equestrian statue of Claudius that was toppled in Colchester and taken away as a trophy. Of course, this can never be confirmed but the head is a tantalising symbol of the violent challenge to Roman authority.

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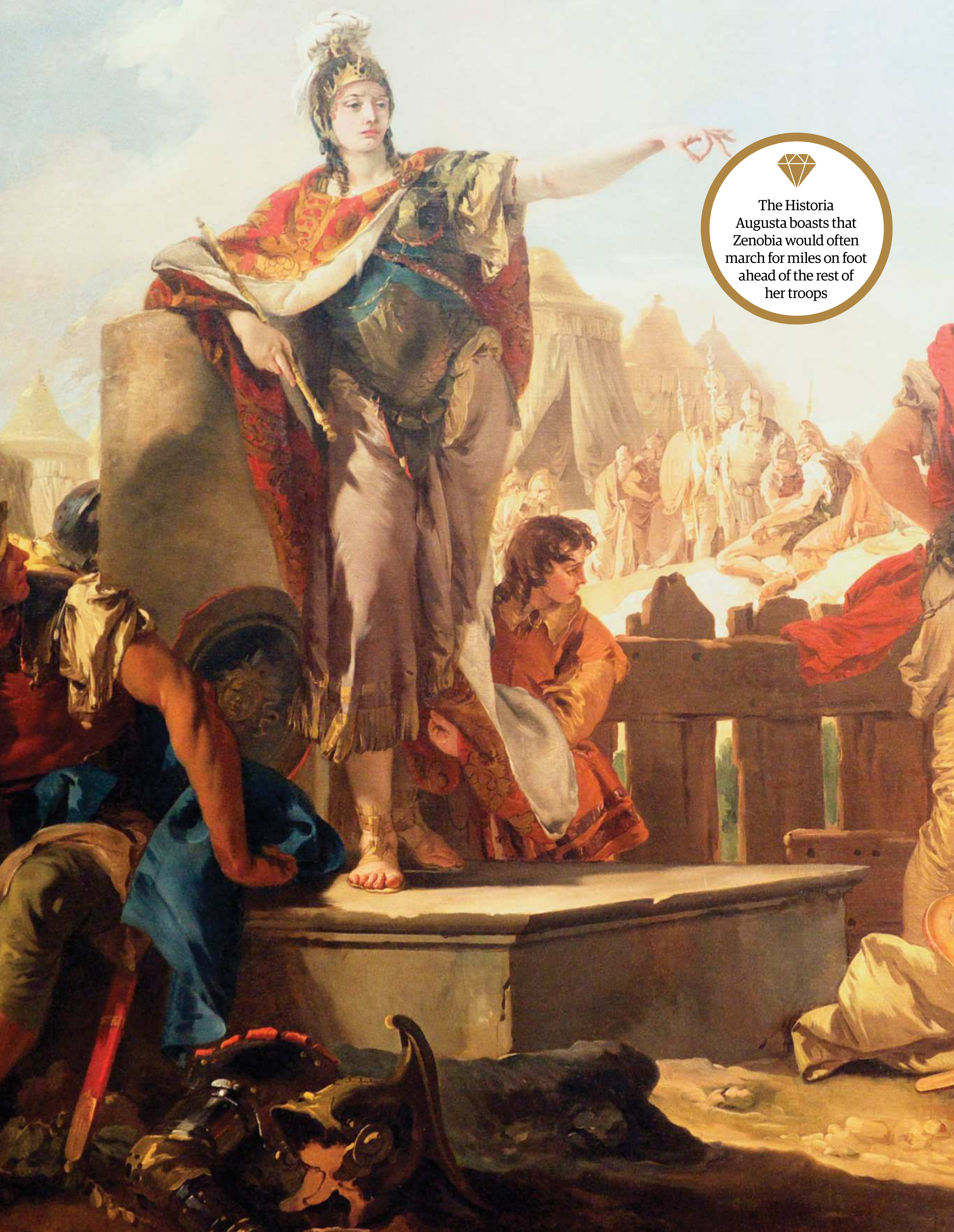


The Historia Augusta boasts that Zenobia would often march for miles on foot ahead of the rest of her troops

c. 267 – 272 CE

ZENOBIA

Armed with the bravery and beauty of her ancestor Cleopatra, Zenobia defied the Romans to rule her own empire in the Middle East

Blame William Shakespeare – or Elizabeth Taylor – for the fact that Cleopatra has overshadowed all other strong, cunning and comely queens of antiquity. Three centuries after the legendary Cleopatra ruled from the Pharaoh's throne in Egypt, her blood heiress, as well as equal in courage and beauty, rose to power in the eastern oasis of Palmyra, in modern-day Syria. After the assassination of her war-hero husband, Zenobia assumed confident control of this wealthy city-state on the fringes of the fading Roman Empire in the 3rd century CE. Claiming independence from Rome, she would drive her loyal armies across Egypt and Palestine, briefly ruling a large and stable empire of her own. But her kingdom, and life, would ultimately be cut short by the sword of the conquering Roman Emperor Aurelian.

The true story of Zenobia is shrouded in centuries of legend. The earliest historical source is the wildly unreliable *Historia Augusta*, a colourful work of fiction posing as fact from the 4th century CE. The 18th-century historian Edward Gibbon, in his monumental work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, relied heavily on descriptions of Zenobia found in the *Historia Augusta* to paint his own romanticised portrait of the Palmyrene queen.

"Modern Europe has produced several illustrious women who have sustained with glory the weight of empire," wrote Gibbon. "But... Zenobia is perhaps the only female whose superior genius broke through the servile indolence imposed on her sex by the climate and manners of Asia. She claimed her descent from the Macedonian kings of Egypt, equalled in beauty her ancestor Cleopatra and far surpassed that princess in chastity and valour. Zenobia was esteemed the most lovely as well as the most heroic of her sex."

Modern historians have pieced together a more reliable biography of Zenobia from early Christian sources, archaeological inscriptions and ancient coins, but much of her life story is still up for debate, starting with her lineage and ethnicity. Much is made of Zenobia's claimed relation to Cleopatra along the famed Seleucid bloodline on her mother's side. Her father also ruled Palmyra and was descended from a long line of Roman citizens, as well as royalty dating back to Julia Domna, the influential empress wife of Roman Emperor Lucius Septimus Severus.

Whether or not either of these genealogies are true, it's clear that Zenobia was born into a wealthy and powerful family in a city-state at the height of its own wealth and power. Palmyra is located in the middle of the desert halfway between the Euphrates River valley and the Mediterranean Sea. Underground springs transformed the land into a fertile oasis and a critical stop on the Silk Road trade route that brought spices and textiles from the exotic East to the bustling markets of Rome. Palmyra's security forces offered protection to passing caravans while the government exacted an import tax – 25 per cent of every camel load – to fill Palmyra's substantial coffers.

> Tracing her ancestry, historians now believe that Zenobia may have had Aramaean or even Jewish origins

Zenobia, as described by Gibbon, was an olive-skinned beauty who spoke Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Ancient Egyptian. Unlike the delicate noblewomen of Rome – who wouldn't leave the house without a protective veil and covered carriage – Zenobia was a capable camel and horse rider who enjoyed wild lion and panther hunts as much as her husband.

Zenobia was the second wife of Odaenathus, the ruler of Palmyra and a critical ally of Rome in the east. During Odaenathus' rule, Palmyra was an important buffer state between the Romans and the Persian Sasanian Empire. ▶

Rome allowed Palmyra to remain independent in exchange for its strategic neutrality in the region. In 260 CE, the Persians captured the Roman Emperor Valerian and conquered the eastern Roman stronghold of Antioch. Fearing a Persian expansion towards Palmyra, Odaenathus decided to strike first, decimating the Persian army as it returned victorious from Antioch. Later Palmyrene campaigns would later push the Persians all the way back to their capital. These victories won Odaenathus praise and titles from Rome and may have triggered visions of his own future rise to become Emperor himself.

Odaenathus would not live long enough to find out. He was murdered by a nephew along with his son Hairan, from his first wife, over a hunting argument. Odaenathus' death left Zenobia's young son Vaballathus as heir to the throne. Since the boy was too young to rule – between five and ten years old – Zenobia assumed the role of regent, a position that quickly evolved into the undisputed political and military leader of Palmyra. On coins recovered from the years after Odaenathus' murder, archaeologists first find them with Vaballathus' face on the front and Zenobia's on the back. Very quickly these positions are reversed.

As the de facto ruler of Palmyra, Zenobia picked up exactly where her husband left off, with her own dreams of a Palmyrene Empire. Historians argue about Zenobia's specific motivations and political calculations. During the 3rd century, the Roman Empire suffered an extended period of great tribulation known as the Imperial Crisis. The Empire had gone through 19 emperors in 30 years, most of them killed by ambitious generals or their own Praetorian Guard. Britain and Gaul had split from the Empire, the Goths were invading from the north, there was a smallpox epidemic in the provinces and pirates were disrupting trade along the Libyan coast. In Rome's moment of weakness, Zenobia saw an opportunity, but did she see herself as Rome's partner in empire, or as its conqueror?

What happened next is undisputed. In the year 269 CE, with the support of her husband's battle-tested General Zabdas, Zenobia marched the Palmyrene army rightinto Egypt, what she called her ancestral homeland. When the Roman prefect of Egypt objected to Zenobia's occupation, she swiftly had him beheaded. Zenobia bestowed upon herself the title of Queen of Egypt and commissioned a ten-volume history of Cleopatra to commemorate the victory. If the Roman Emperor Claudius had his own objections, he was too busy fighting off the Goths to worry about the upstart empress in Egypt.

Zenobia's chief counsellor, Cassius Longinus, was a noted scholar, Platonic philosopher, as well as a literary critic

"When the Roman prefect of Egypt objected to Zenobia's occupation, she swiftly had him beheaded"

AURELIAN THE UNSTOPPABLE

After the Imperial Crisis of the 3rd century, the Roman Empire owed its survival to the hard-nosed military mastermind Aurelian. Born into a family of humble peasant farmers in the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire near the Balkans, he joined a long line of tough and disciplined military men. Aurelian rose to prominence as a strict and stalwart army officer during one of the messiest periods in Imperial history. In 268, the Emperor Gallienus was under fire from the so-called Thirty Tyrants, Roman military and political leaders who aimed to topple the throne. Aurelian, along with his compatriot Claudius, put down the rebellion, but may have played a role in Gallienus' assassination. Claudius succeeded as Emperor, but died after only 18 months, making room for no-nonsense Aurelian to assume the crown. He whipped the Roman legions into shape and marched them on the barbarian marauders – groups such as the Goths, Vandals, Alemanni and Juthungi – threatening Roman sovereignty in northern Italy. By this point, Zenobia had established herself as the Queen of the East and ruler of the independent Palmyrene Empire. If Aurelian had any hesitation about crushing a woman, he didn't show it, and brought the full force of his best legions against Zenobia, finally offering her a measure of mercy if she would surrender her empire at the gates of Palmyra. When she refused, Aurelian dragged her captive to Rome and had her entire inner circle executed. He returned two years later during a short-lived revolt.

Defining moment

Assassination of Odaenathus

266 CE

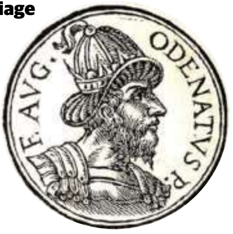
Zenobia's husband, Odaenathus, died far from the battlefield. One story sees him going on a hunting trip with a rude nephew, Maeonius, who Odaenathus punished by taking away his horse and locking him up for a few nights. Insulted, young Maeonius killed the Palmyrene king at a party. Other accounts implicate Rome in the murder. Another story puts Zenobia herself at the centre of the plot. Odaenathus was killed along with his eldest son, putting the throne in the hands of Zenobia's son Vaballathus and under her capable control.

Timeline

240 CE

- **A Queen is born**
  Cleopatra claimed to be descended from Isis and Zenobia hitched her own star to Cleopatra's. She was born into the ruling family of Palmyra and schooled in language, philosophy, horse riding and hunting.
  240 CE

- **Her match in marriage**
  Zenobia became the second wife of Odaenathus, whose bravery and cunning on the battlefield were a perfect match for his ambitious young warrior bride.
  258 CE


F. AVG. ODENATVS P.

- **An heir in waiting**
  Zenobia bore Odaenathus a son, Vaballathus, but the direct heir to the Palmyrene throne was Hairan, a child by Odaenathus' first wife. In Zenobia's day, it was common for competing wives to jostle – or even kill – to get their son on the throne.
  259 CE

- **Taking Egypt**
  Zenobia and her trusted general marched uncontested into Egypt while Rome's military was busy fighting off Goth invaders and Libyan pirates. The Egyptian people embraced Zenobia as the rightful heir to Cleopatra's greatness.
  269 CE

Without Roman resistance, Zenobia the warrior queen was given free rein to extend her territory into Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. At its greatest extent, Zenobia's empire stretched from the Nile River in the south up through the Sinai Peninsula and Palestine, north to the Black Sea and west to modern-day Ankara, Turkey. Around this time, Zenobia changed her coins yet again to add the title Augustus, or empress, alongside her own portrait.

In 270, a new face appeared on the scene in the form of Aurelian, a lifelong military man who rose to the ranks to become Emperor of Rome and Restitutor Orbis, or restorer of the world. Aurelian brought order and discipline back to the Roman military. He pushed out invading Germanic tribes such as the Vandals from northern Italy and erected the fortress-like Aurelian Walls around Rome. Next he marched against the Goths in the Balkans and crushed them. By 272, Aurelian had dealt with Rome's most pressing problems and was ready to turn his attention east to the so-called Palmyrene Empire and its warrior empress. The *Historia Augusta* relates Zenobia writing a letter to Aurelian proposing that they rule the Mediterranean as co-emperors. If that letter ever actually existed, then Aurelian likely ignored it.

Aurelian and Zenobia first met in battle at Antioch. Zenobia's forces were anchored by heavily armoured cavalry called clibanarii, using a style of warfare borrowed from the Persians. Both horses and riders were covered with thick armoured plates to withstand a line of Roman archers known as sagittariorum. The clibanarii had a weakness, though, and Aurelian exploited it brilliantly. In Latin, clibanarii means the camp oven-bearers, because the armoured suits heat up like a furnace in the midday Sun. Aurelian feinted retreat and lead the cavalry on lengthy chases, timing his greatest offensive to coincide with the greatest heat of the day. Zenobia's overheated cavalry were no match for Aurelian's well-trained legions and Zenobia retreated to Emissa, modern-day Homs.

Aurelian attacked Zenobia again at Emissa, using Palestinian slingers – armed with rocks and slings, like young David who fought Goliath – to disrupt and confuse the Palmyrene cavalry. At one point, the 70,000-strong cavalry turned in on itself, trampling its own horsemen in the chaos. Zenobia was right there alongside her troops. "In both [battles] the Queen of Palmyra animated the armies by her presence," Gibbon writes. Facing defeat at Emissa, however, Zenobia decided to flee to the stronghold of Palmyra on her speediest camel.

Back in Palmyra, Zenobia failed to gather enough forces to engage in conventional warfare. Aurelian laid siege to the city for months, which, according to Gibbon, drew criticism from Rome.

In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon quotes a letter from Aurelian: "The Roman people speak with contempt of the war that I am waging against a woman. They're ignorant both of the character and of the power of Zenobia. It's impossible to enumerate her warlike preparations, of stones, of arrows and every species of missile weapons. Every part of the wall is provided with two or three ballistae and artificial fires are thrown from her military engines. The fear of punishment has armed her with courage."

In the end, the gods favoured Rome, Palmyra swiftly fell and Zenobia, along with her son and heir, was captured. The *Historia Augusta* recalls Zenobia being paraded through the streets of Rome in golden chains. Other accounts say she died on the journey from Palmyra, while others still claim she committed suicide – like her tragic heroine Cleopatra – rather than suffer the indignity of submitting to the Emperor or facing the jeering Roman crowds. ◆

> Zenobia's rule of Palmyra, including her rebellious campaign against the Roman Empire, lasted less than five years

Life in the time of Zenobia

STEALING FROM ROME'S OWN BREADBASKET

Rome supplied free rations of wheat to its citizens to win their political loyalty, but much of the wheat was imported from Egypt. When Zenobia conquered Egypt, she allegedly cut off the wheat supply, a tactic not unlike kicking a hornet's nest.

BY NAME ONLY

The wealthy city-state of Palmyra held a unique position in the Roman Empire. It functioned as an independent colony, free to collect its own taxes, but privy to the protection of the emperor. Palmyra grew fat off the taxes levied on caravans travelling the Silk Road to the west.

SPICE SECURITY

As a critical stop on the Silk Road, Palmyra was responsible for protecting the silk and spice caravans along the stretch of road within its boundaries. The task fell to private armies of swift horsemen that earned a reputation for their prowess at repelling bandits.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Zenobia's full name in Greek was Septimia Zenobia, but was most likely a Latinisation of the Arabic al-Zabba, which was itself a translation of Zenobia's true Aramaic name, Bat-Zabbai, or 'daughter of Zabbai'. Zenobia's native language was Aramaic.

ROMAN TRIUMPH

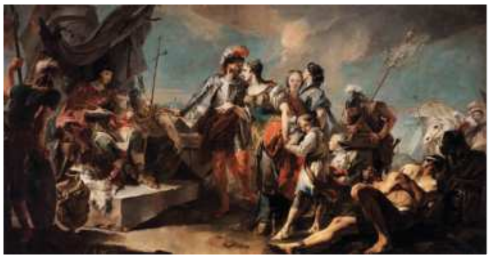
Some sources claim that a captured and chained Zenobia was paraded through Rome as part of Aurelian's massive triumph in 274 CE, featuring 800 gladiators and conquered captives from every barbarian tribe. Some say she rode in a golden chariot he had built for her entrance into Rome.

Defining moment

Siege of Palmyra

274 CE

According to exaggerated accounts in the *Historia Augusta*, Aurelian's final offensive against Zenobia at the desert oasis of Palmyra was almost a failure. As the Roman legions marched from Emessa, they were hounded by Syrian robbers and target practise for Persian assassins. His troops exhausted from two massive battles, Aurelian attempted to strike a deal with Zenobia, promising her life and the freedom of her people in return for a peaceful surrender. Zenobia said that she, like Cleopatra, preferred death to dishonour. She threatened Aurelian with talk of reinforcements from Persia. Aurelian surrounded and starved out the city, bringing Palmyra to its knees.



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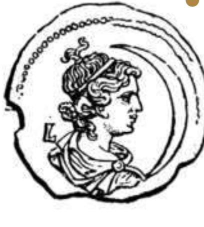


Face fit for a coin
Zenobia ordered the Alexandria mint to produce new coins featuring her silhouette and the presumptuous inscription, 'S. Zenobia Aug', shorthand for Septimia Zenobia Augusta, Empress of the East.
270 CE

Bread baroness
Zenobia further provoked Rome by cutting off Egyptian wheat exports to the Imperial capital, where politicians assuaged the plebeians with free bread and circuses. If she was picking a fight, she would certainly get one.
271 CE

Eastern empire
At its peak, Zenobia's Palmyrene Empire absorbed the entire eastern shore of the Mediterranean, stretching from the Nile to the Black Sea. Most of her conquered territory submitted to their new empress without resistance.
272 CE

Aurelian strikes back
Emperor Aurelian follows his conquest of the Goths by turning his attention – and his armies – east to the Palmyrene Empire. In a rare move by the severe general, Aurelian spares the citizens of conquered Palmyrene cities, causing even more to surrender peacefully.
273 CE

274

527–548 CE

THEODORA
OF BYZANTIUM

As a courtesan who had risen to the rank of queen, Theodora was both loved and reviled. Just who was the woman behind one of Byzantium's greatest emperors?

Born to a bear trainer and an actress in Constantinople, the woman fated to become the wife of a Byzantine emperor hardly had an auspicious start in life. In Theodora's early years her life took a path that her later detractors would revel in, providing effortless fuel for the gossip that surrounded her even after death. There is little doubt that Theodora had two intertwined and equally suspect occupations before her marriage: she was well-known both as an actress and as a courtesan. This line of work was also taken by at least one of her two sisters, and it is said that her mother ushered the girls into their professions after the death of their father, Acacius.

John of Ephesus, a writer sympathetic towards Theodora, refers to her as having come "from the brothel", while the less friendly Procopius, whose writings are our largest single source of information on Theodora, also repeats this detail. From Procopius, we learn that the young Theodora made quite a name for herself: with her provocative dress and a habit of stripping on stage, she titillated her audiences, allowing buckets of grain to be emptied between her legs for geese to peck out. When the raunchy performances were over, Theodora would go further and offer herself to all, both high and low, attending banquets to drum up custom.

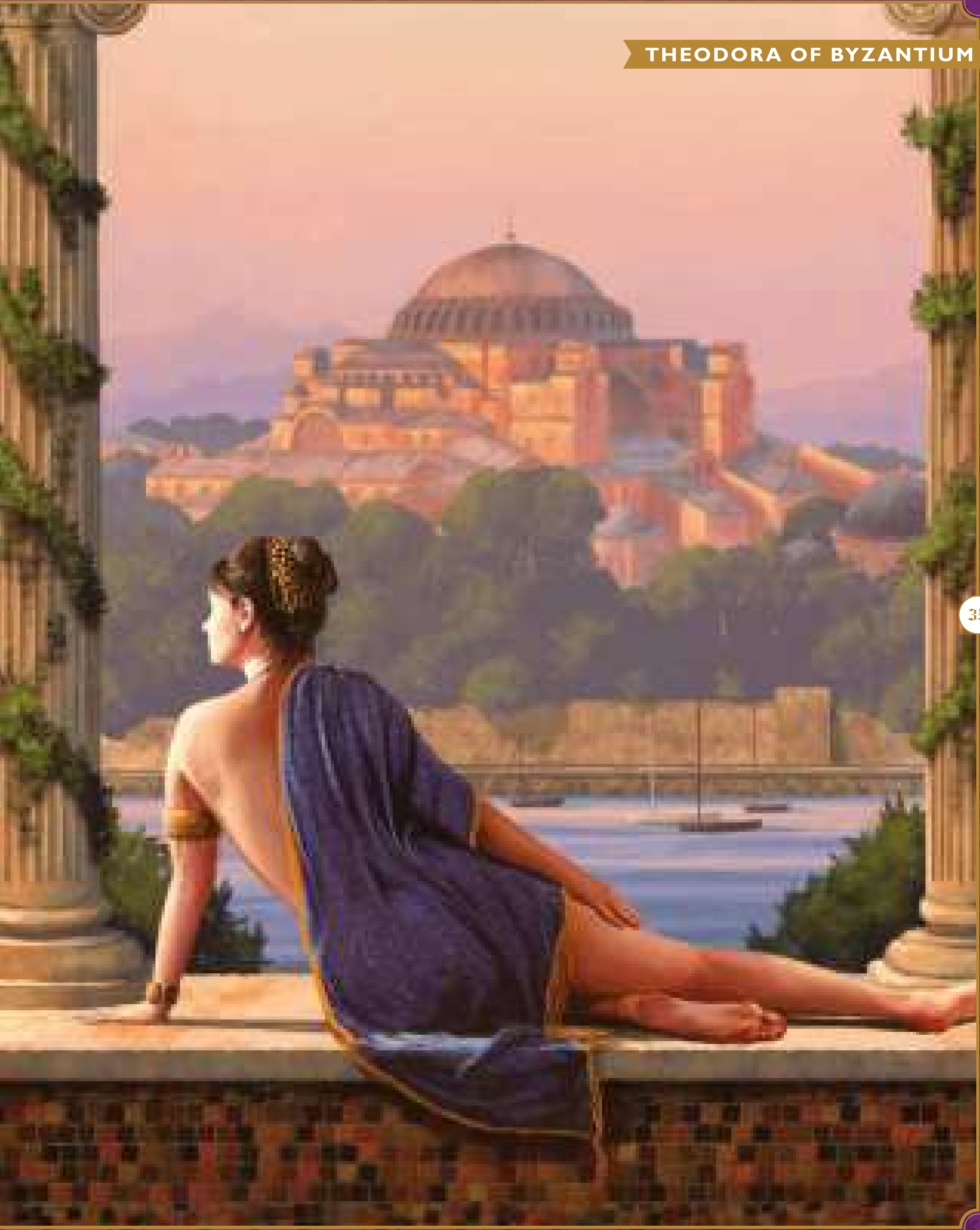
However true or not the worst exaggerations of Procopius, this was not a life that would do for Theodora. Early on it became apparent that she was intelligent, resourceful and able to think for herself, traits that would serve her well. At 16, Theodora left Constantinople for North Africa, where she spent four years in the role as mistress to Hecebolius, a Syrian official. The whole matter ended in tears, but this did not bring her down; on her slow return to Constantinople via Alexandria and Antioch, Theodora met patriarchs and others of influence, learning and honing the skills and manners that she displayed to such great effect as empress. It was during this time that she is said to have converted to the controversial Monophysite religion, which held the belief that the human and divine natures of Christ were fused into one.

Setting her former occupations behind her, in 522, in her early 20s, Theodora returned to Constantinople. She became a wool spinner, making her home close to the palace. Here she caught the eye of Justinian - heir and nephew to Emperor Justin I. The middle-aged Justinian was determined to marry Theodora: but there was one, apparently insurmountable, obstacle. An old law stated that government officials were prohibited from marrying actresses, and although Theodora had renounced her previous role, her dalliance with the stage now barred her from becoming Justinian's wife. On top of this, Euphemia, empress to Justin I, was a firm upholder of this law, and, due to religious and personal differences, was further ill-disposed towards Theodora. It seemed as if the couple were to be thwarted, but luck was on their side as Euphemia died in c.524. Free now to act without causing himself marital strife and also under pressure from his heir, Justin repealed the law and the couple married soon after, uncaring of the scandal that followed in its wake.

In 527, Justinian and Theodora became emperor, and empress of Byzantium. Theodora made no effort to hide her past; friends from her old life were made welcome at the palace, and her illegitimate daughter - whether Justinian's or from a previous relationship is unclear - was free to join her mother. Justinian likewise does not seem troubled by his wife's past, possibly due to his own less-than-illustrious beginnings. Despite or perhaps because of her humble start in life, Theodora was a stickler for ceremony and show in her role of empress. Looks and appearances were everything, and she would not let anyone - high or low - forget for one moment that she was empress. Images of Theodora show a well-dressed woman, resplendent in gold and purple robes and glittering jewellery, the crown that marked her power and high position visible for all to see. Theodora ensured that she was given due honour and acknowledgement by visiting officials and members of the imperial household, allegedly making important dignitaries wait for hours at a time before receiving them.

It is thought that Theodora first made a name for herself with a carnal performance of the Leda & the Swan Greek myth

Theodora was not content to be a trophy wife, and there are clear indications that she sought to better herself. She was an avid reader, choosing to read herself rather than be read to, and was actively involved in governing the empire. She saw that those she favoured were promoted and received positions, while actively working to remove those who did not support her. The empress did not suffer fools, and, according to Theodora's detractors at least, did not hesitate to remove those who displeased her. It was not unusual for a Byzantine empress to have influence both in court and even political matters, bestowing patronage and holding sway with her husband. Likewise, communicating with foreign envoys and visiting dignitaries was well within the remit of the role. With Theodora, however, came the first time that an empress went further; not only did she fill the conventionally accepted place of consort, but, according to some accounts, she was empress regnant in her own right in all but name. Unsurprisingly, there was hostility towards ▶

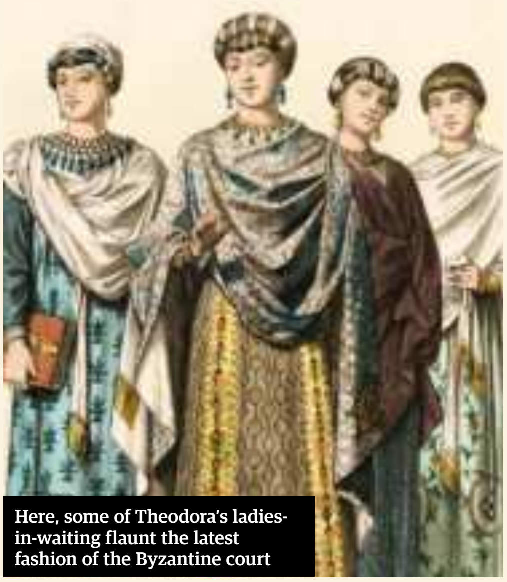


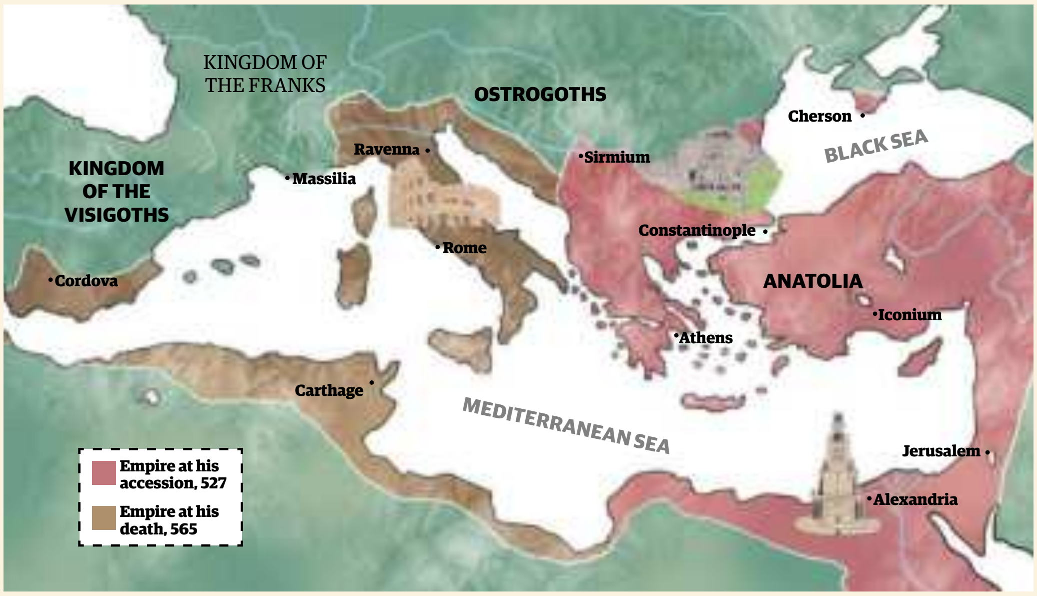
the upstart empress, and there were grumbles, both behind closed doors and publicly, about the brazen woman from such humble beginnings. Indeed, Theodora's seemingly flaunting of her past and refusal to disown her background was seen as a challenge to the established order.

Of course, when Justinian embarked upon a series of reforms within the city, Theodora was not idle. The rights of women were something that particularly concerned Theodora. In 528, women of all classes were protected by a law that ordered the death penalty for kidnap or rape, whereas before lower class women and slaves were exempt, at the mercy of anyone. In 534-535, laws on prostitution were also tightened, and it became illegal to force or coerce anyone into the profession. Likewise, women were granted more rights in cases of divorce and also where property was concerned through her direct involvement, and killing a wife who had committed adultery was also prohibited.

In all of this, Theodora had the emperor's support, who listened to and respected her views. Theodora was instrumental in attempts to reform the corruption in Constantinople's brothels. Prostitution was a major issue within the city, and exploitation and mistreatment were rife. With her husband's backing, Theodora set out to address this, setting up a convent as an escape for the women caught in this abusive life. Sources differ, however, and two distinct versions of events can be read. In one telling, the women were rescued from the horrors of the streets, living in comfort and harmony in their reformed lives behind the convent walls. But Procopius paints a more sinister picture: in his version, the women were kidnapped, moved into the convent against their will and forcibly reformed. The empress, far from being their saviour, was in fact jailer and tormentor; the women did not want to be removed from the life they knew, and some even committed suicide by throwing themselves onto the rocks below the convent in utter despair at their 'rescue'.

Not mentioned by contemporary sources, it is likely that the worst excesses recounted by Procopius were part of the embittered smear campaign later carried out against Theodora and Justinian. Whether truthful or not, there are hints at a darker side to Theodora's story, at the lengths the proud and self-righteous empress would go to achieve her aims. There are tales of forced marriages


Here, some of Theodora's ladies-in-waiting flaunt the latest fashion of the Byzantine court



The Byzantine Empire

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL FORCES IN EUROPE FOR 1,000 YEARS

The Byzantine Empire began in 330, when Emperor Constantine founded a new city, Constantinople, on the site of Byzantium, a former Greek colony. The empire's two halves, the West and the East, increasingly diverged over the years, but this benefitted the eastern part, which survived after the western half fell in 476 before the Visigoth barbarian Odoacer.

Ruled by Roman law and with Roman-based political institutions, the empire's main languages were Latin and Greek. The Byzantine Empire reached its greatest peak geographically during Justinian's reign, when most of the Western Empire was reclaimed. At its height, the empire was a seat of culture; theology, art and literature were promoted and preserved within it. It was also a large influence on the West as Byzantine scholars were commissioned to translate Greek and Arabic texts that would otherwise have been lost. Despite many challenges, the empire kept its position due to strength of location, power of wealth and political influence.

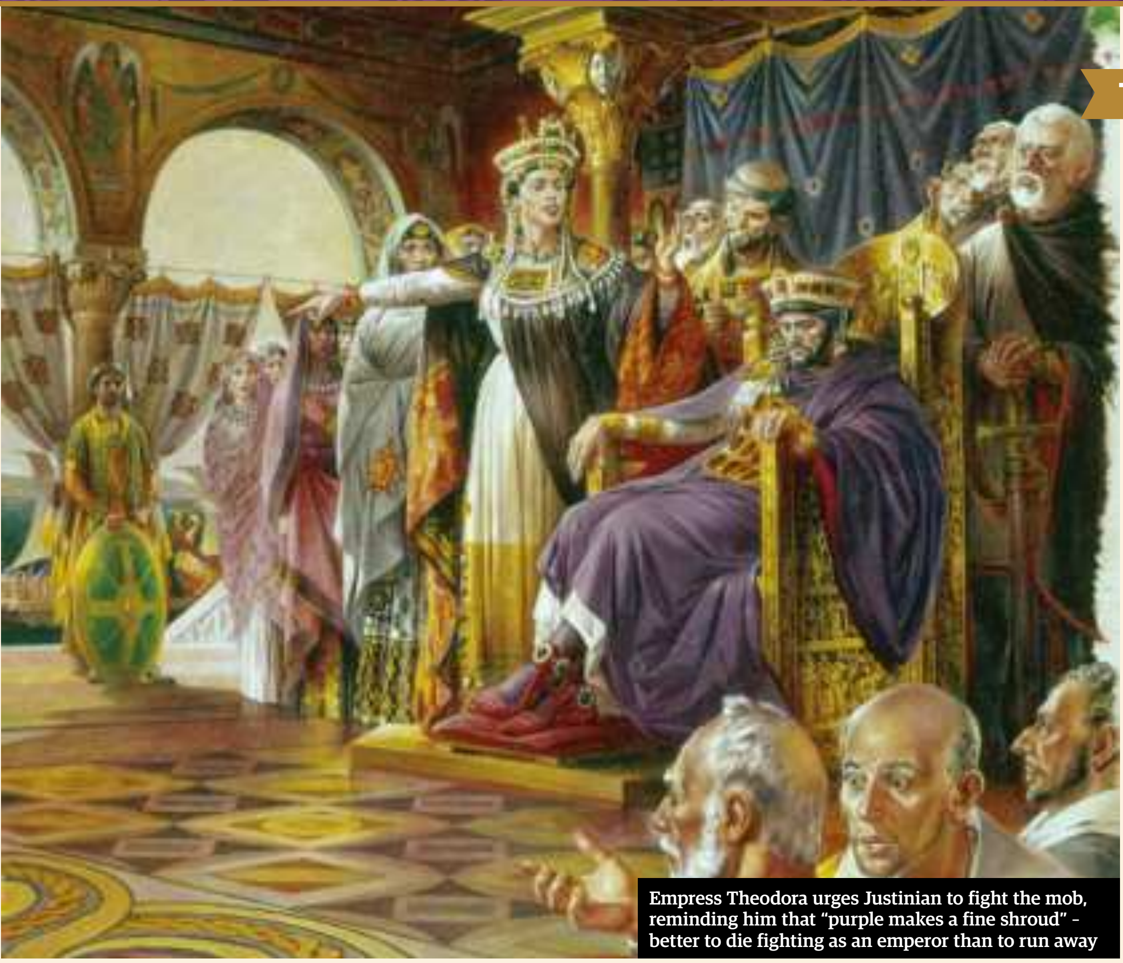
Nevertheless, The Byzantine Empire declined from the 13th century, suffering losses both economically and territorial. By the 14th century, the empire was threatened by the rising Turks. The end came on 29 May 1453 when Constantinople was attacked and won by the Ottoman emperor Mehmed II. Emperor Constantine died in the fighting, sealing the fate of the long-lived empire, with the Hagia Sophia cathedral taken over and turned into a mosque.

Theodora would prove to be her husband's strongest supporter

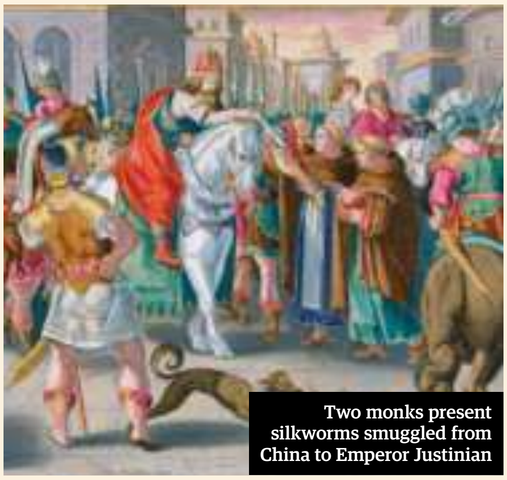
Timeline

533 CE

- **North Africa**
Justinian's troops win a decisive victory, reclaiming the North African territories that had been conquered by the Vandals, marking the beginning of two decades of conquest.
533 CE
- **Sicily**
General Belisarius invades with a force of 7,500 men and, meeting little resistance, conquers Sicily, gaining a gateway through into Italy and beyond.
535 CE
- **Rome**
Rome is captured in December, only to be besieged by Vitigis, the king of the Ostrogoths, from February 537 until March 538. Justinian's troops emerge triumphant.
536 CE
- **Milan**
The city is claimed by Mundilas, but this victory is short-lived; despite relief being sent, Milan is recaptured and burned by the vengeful might of the Gothic army.
538 CE



Empress Theodora urges Justinian to fight the mob, reminding him that "purple makes a fine shroud" - better to die fighting as an emperor than to run away



Two monks present silkworms smuggled from China to Emperor Justinian

at Theodora's behest, and the vindictive hounding of officials who displeased her from office. Although not proven, there were also rumours Theodora was involved in the murder of Amalasuintha of the Goths, a potential rival for Justinian's hand.

It is Theodora's reported influence during the infamous Nika revolt that is the most cited example of her power and influence, both in political matters and with her husband. In January 532, the Hippodrome in Constantinople was the scene of the biggest challenge to Justinian's reign. The emperor's sweeping reforms and expansive building programme instigated throughout the city were met with protest at the disruption they caused, and this discontent erupted as the pressures took their toll on an already strained population. Riots broke out, and although they were put down and the ringleaders rounded up, two escaped, with mercy demanded for the fugitives at the next races. Justinian denied this and violence surged afresh, and with the additional involvement of members of the aristocracy, it became a political coup with the intention of removing the emperor for good.

A rival candidate, a nobleman with imperial blood named Hypatius, was proposed and enthroned, the violence in the Hippodrome escalating and forcing Justinian and his advisers back into the palace. The emperor was prepared to flee, but Theodora told her husband that it was not the time to run away - an emperor should never be in the position of fugitive, and it was better to die an emperor in the role allotted to him than to be safe in hiding. Shamed, scolded or given much-needed fight, Justinian stood firm. Sending his troops to the Hippodrome, the revolt was decisively crushed, with between 30,000 and 35,000 rebels left dead. The pretender Hypatius was executed, as were others closely involved, and Justinian emerged the victor: his position unassailable and his wife vindicated and triumphant.

After Nika, Justinian's position was never seriously challenged again. Theodora had been instrumental in this display of power, and is generally considered to have saved the day. It was not the only time she was said to have saved Justinian's throne: when in the early 540s Justinian lay seriously ill with plague, it was Theodora who effectively took over the reins of state, holding them until her husband recovered.

With their relationship based on mutual respect and affection, Theodora and Justinian presented a united front, even when they differed in opinion. For example, Theodora had converted to the controversial Monophysite brand of Christianity at an early age, while the emperor stood firm in his Chalcedonian beliefs. The fact they maintained their differences while respecting each other and working together demonstrated their empathy, maturity and integrity. Here again Theodora's influence can be seen; she founded a Monophysite monastery and offered protection in the palace for those who were in danger for their beliefs, sheltering Monophysite bishops and leaders. One in particular, Anthimus, the patriarch of Constantinople, she sheltered for 12 years in her own chambers. Theodora apparently outfoxed her own husband when it came to the conversion of the people of Nobatae in southern Egypt; Justinian had earmarked them for the Chalcedonian faith, but through her wiles, Theodora caused his missionaries to be delayed, her own Monophysite men arriving first and winning the common people to the Monophysite cause.

Theodora died in Constantinople on 28 June 548. Her influence continued through the respect and honour Justinian showed to her name, with his grief at her funeral declared to be most genuine by those who observed it. Not only did he maintain his promise to Theodora to protect the Monophysite community she had established, Justinian also continued to enact legislation that dealt with the rights of women as his wife had done during her life, ensuring that Theodora's legacy to the city lived long after her. Charismatic, bold and unforgettable, Theodora remains one of the most fascinating and influential empresses the Byzantine Empire had ever known. ◆

> Theodora and Justinian are saints in the Eastern Orthodox Church and are commemorated on 14 November

Ravenna
The one-time capital of the Western Roman Empire and current capital of the Ostrogoths is reached by Belisarius and taken for the empire in May of this year.
540 CE

Italy
Troubles abound for Justinian's forces during the next decade as he loses ground in Italy due to fighting in the east. Much of what had already been gained is lost.
541 CE

Iberian Peninsula
With an army 2,000 strong, the empire's forces take several south-eastern cities; the new province of Spania will be founded in the aftermath.
552 CE

Italy
Under Narses, the empire's forces finally prove triumphant against an enemy force of 30,000 and, after protracted fighting, Italy is decisively reclaimed for the empire.
554 CE

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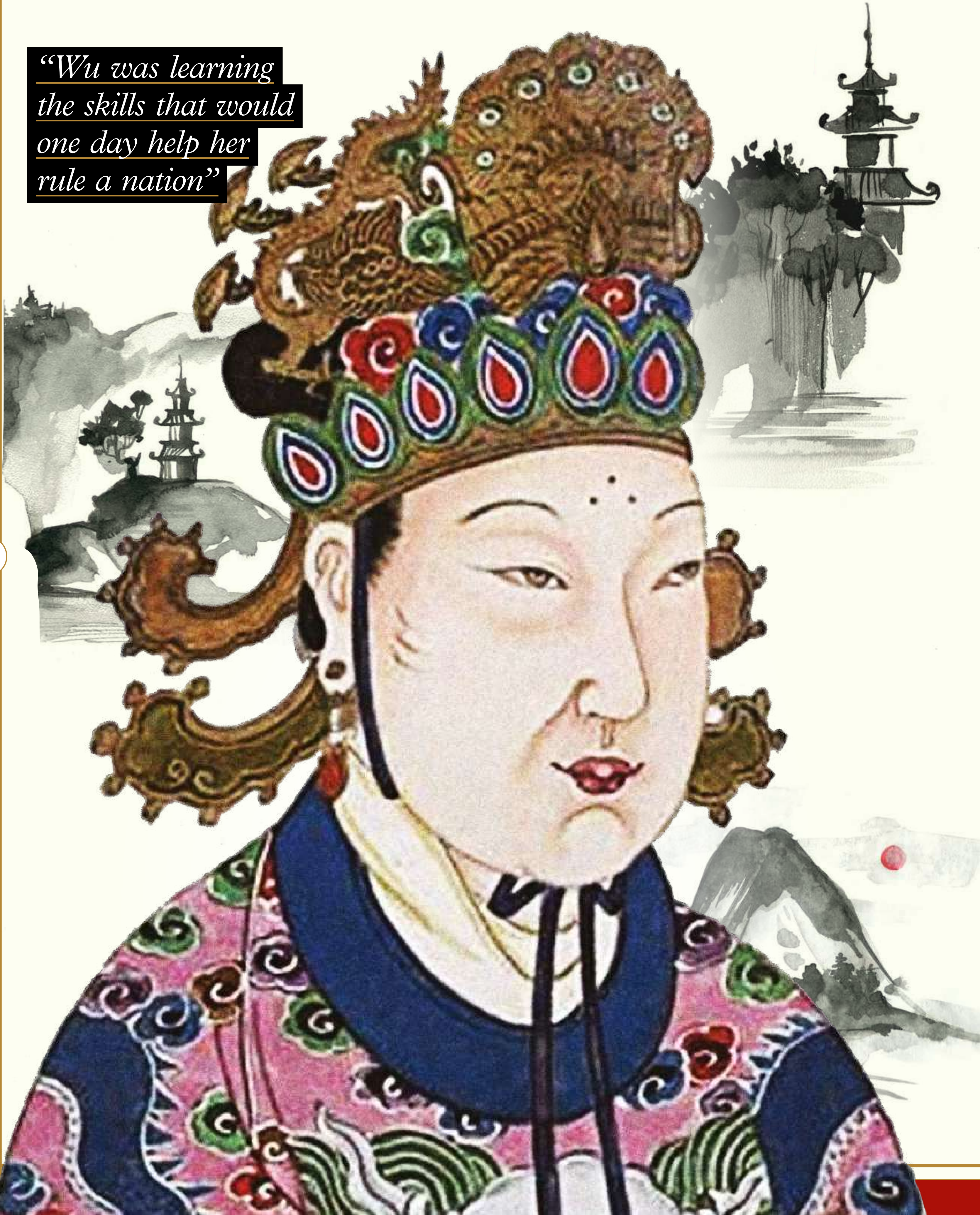
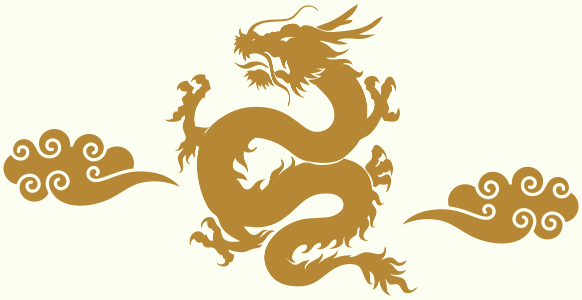
“Wu was learning the skills that would one day help her rule a nation”





THE DRAGON EMPRESS

Peaceful reformer or scheming murderer, the true nature of the only woman to rule China in her own right is shrouded in mystery

WRITTEN BY FRANCES WHITE

The Guanzhong Plain in Shanxi province is scattered with 20 mausoleums to Tang dynasty rulers. However, one of the tombs at Qianling Mausoleum is different from the others. Normally, the huge stone slab that sits outside a tomb lists the great deeds of the dead, but this one's tablet is blank. Known as the Wordless Stele, it marks the tomb of the only woman to rule China in her own right as an empress in the country's 2,000 years of history.

On the one hand, Empress Wu Zetian's blank slate suggests she did nothing memorable. Others will tell you it hints at a life of murder, betrayals and scheming – acts not worthy of inscription. Yet, it belongs a woman who ruled over one of the most peaceful and prosperous periods of China's history, and even gave the lower orders of Chinese society their first ever voice in how they were governed.

This is because the historians who were expected to recount her great deeds upon the tablet were men who hated her. The blank stone, much like Wu herself, presents two possibilities – a woman so indescribably evil that a single good deed cannot be etched upon it, or a country so unwilling to upset the status quo that a blank stone is better than the truth that challenges it.

Wu was born in 624 to a wealthy family that had made its money in the timber business. While most young girls were instructed in what would make them a good wife, Wu's father allowed her to follow her own interests. An intelligent girl, she was actively encouraged to widen her education, to read books and learn about politics, government, writing, literature and music. As most girls did needlework, Wu was learning the skills that one would day help her rule a nation. Because of her father's support, she was encouraged to step beyond what was expected of her gender from a very early age.

Wu's quick mind, coupled with her good looks, attracted the attention of the Emperor Taizong of Tang and she was selected to become one of his concubines. Aged just 14 years old, Wu was spirited away to his court, a palace of schemes, plots and power plays, likely a terrifying place for a young girl to be thrust into – but she was a quick learner.

Sources vary as to the emperor's feelings towards Wu, with some claiming she became a quick favourite and others the opposite. What we do know is that she was hardly a timid, kneeling, submissive mistress because while still assigned to the ageing emperor, she began an affair with his son, Prince Li Zhi.

Li Zhi's feelings for Wu are in no debate – he was completely in love with her. When Taizong died, all of his concubines, as tradition dictated, had their heads shaved and were sent to live out the rest of their days at a Buddhist convent. When Li Zhi became emperor in 649, taking the name of Gaozong, he broke with tradition and demanded Wu's return as his own concubine. Surprisingly, Gaozong's wife, Empress Wang, had actually encouraged the return. Wang had hoped that Wu might divert attention from one of the ruler's other concubines, Xiao Shufei. Wang was right, but she would rue the day.

Wu had two sons with Gaozong but that fact alone would not have worried Wang and Xiao. ▶

The Wordless Stele marking Wu Zetian's tomb

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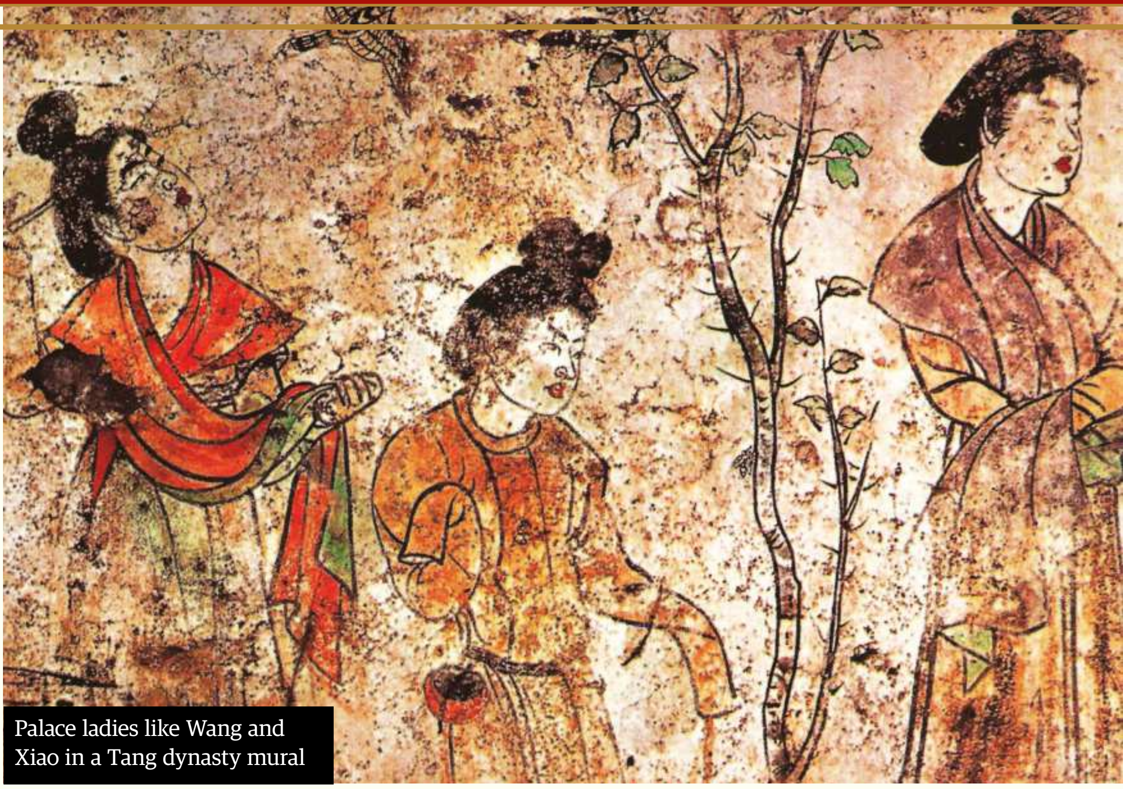


Palace ladies like Wang and Xiao in a Tang dynasty mural

The emperor had already chosen a successor – his chancellor was his wife's uncle, and he had named his son, Li Zhong, as his current heir. However, Wu had another baby in 654, a girl, who was found dead in her crib just days after being born.

This is where the historical narratives split. For Wu, the culprit was clear – Wang was jealous of her husband's affections for her and of her ability to bear him children, and she had taken it out on her newborn baby. Wang was the last person seen in the room and had no alibi. Wu claimed that Wang had strangled her child and was practising witchcraft, along with Xiao. The charges were taken very seriously and the emperor sided with Wu over his wife. Wang and Xiao were exiled from the palace, Li Zhong stripped of his position as heir and Wu given the role of first wife.

Wu's account of events is not impossible and there is no reason not to believe them. However, they conveniently made her the most powerful woman in China and some Chinese historians view the reality as very different. It is a common belief that Wu killed her own child to implicate Wang and eliminate her as a rival. This is a tale that paints Wu as an ambitious, devilish woman willing to do anything to grasp power, but the men writing these depictions were not keen to portray a female stepping above her station in the best light.

This story was the start of Wu's portrayal as a conniving, ruthless, bloodthirsty temptress, but it was told by men who were convinced a woman in a position of power would upset the balance of nature. Although the tale quickly entered Chinese folklore, the evidence of it being true is nonexistent – it is far more likely that neither woman was responsible for the death and that the child died of asphyxiation due to poor ventilation in the palace. Wu then exploited the situation to her advantage.

Wu briefly claimed to be the bodhisattva Maitreya in order to win supporters, inspiring statues like this

Whatever the truth, Wu found herself in the position of first wife and it was one she did not intend to give up easily. When her husband showed signs of considering the release of the two exiled women, Wu ordered their deaths. Another particularly grisly tale is that she tortured them, chopping up their limbs and putting them into wine jars, saying, "Let these two witches be drunk to their bones!" It's a claim that seems more like a line from a Disney villain than a real-life person and is very difficult to believe.

The two women did end up dead, however, and it is likely that Wu was simply ensuring the survival of herself and her sons, not at all uncommon actions for a man of the era, but viewed with scorn when carried out by a woman. She was almost certainly ambitious but this was the cutthroat Chinese court of the 7th century – Wu needed ambition to survive.

Within five years of their marriage, the emperor suffered a debilitating stroke and Wu took over administrative duties of the court, effectively giving herself her husband's power. There were many who didn't approve of this and Wu knew it but rather than simply letting her enemies plot against her, Wu decided to hit back.

Over one brutal and bloody year, she set about eliminating her enemies and all possible claimants to the throne – 15 family lines were destroyed through executions, accusations of treason and forced suicides. A secret police force was created to spy on her opposition and Wu was extremely effective at taking out anyone who threatened her authority. Wu didn't like people telling her what to do and to the male-dominated Chinese court she was a terrifying concept – a woman who didn't know her place.

After her husband's death in 683, Wu's son Li Zhe was placed on the throne, taking the name Zhongzong. But when the boy refused to comply with her orders, she quickly had him and his wife banished for treason. Her next son, Emperor Ruizong, was equally a disappointment. Weak and unable to rule as she saw fit, she persuaded him to abdicate and declared herself Emperor Zetian, the first female ruler of China.

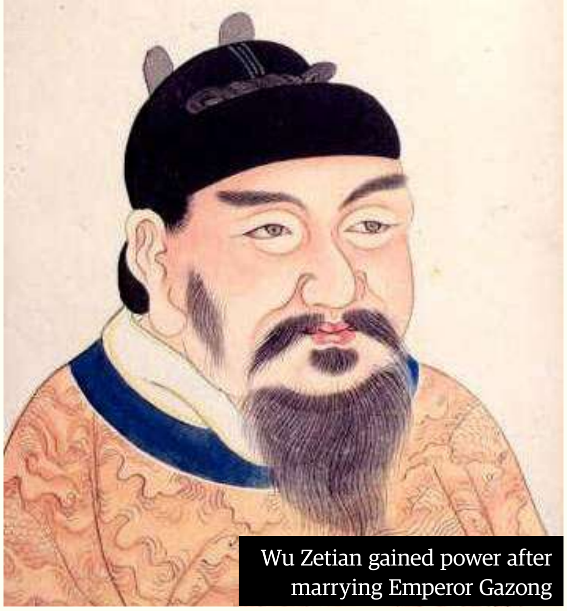
Of course, Wu had been ruling for years before, but now it was official and the men of court did not like it. We can see how uncomfortable they were with the concept of bowing to a female ruler when one scholar claimed that "throughout the empire… hens changed into roosters."

After her accession, an earthquake shook the land – a bad omen proving that a woman ruling as a man had upset the very balance of nature itself. When a mountain was seen to 'appear' afterwards, Wu claimed it was a sign of heavens blessing her reign but many of her ministers disagreed.

One implored her that she should lead "the quiet life of a widow" else "further disasters will befall us." He was promptly exiled to a southern swamp land and other ministers who did not favour her decided to keep their opinions quiet. Instead, their disdain found its way into the histories of her reign as opinions and fears that would eventually be accepted as truths.

Wu did not care about the opinions of men – she made it very clear that her reign was the beginning of something new, and her name, Zetian, meant 'ruler of the heavens'. When she changed the name of the state from Tang to Tianzhou, meaning 'granted by heaven', it was almost as if she was mocking the men who claimed her position was unnatural for a woman by deeming it blessed by the heavens themselves.

Wu bookended the Tang dynasty by making sure that all of the royal family were imprisoned. This may seem cruel in retrospect, but she was simply acting as any man of the time would have. She ensured her grip on the throne would go unchallenged, and this was even more pertinent given that she knew there was a bulls-eye on her back. Wu's time had come and she did not intend to lose it easily.



Wu Zetian gained power after marrying Emperor Gazong

One of her most brazen actions was to create new characters for the Chinese writing system. Intended to replace 10 to 30 of the older ones, this was Wu's way to change not only how China was operating, but the way in which people thought and wrote. It was no mere grasp for power – Wu wanted to change everything about the country, even the words spoken by her people. This, combined with the horrors she had wrought at court, would lead one to assume she was widely despised but the majority of lay-people actually adored her. Wu had shaken things up.

Her spying at court had rooted out institutional corruption and she also opened up the civil examinations to a wider group of people so that more variety was present in local and regional governments. She also created petition boxes, which allowed people to disclose their issues and grievances against court officials. Although she did use these complaints to gain information against rebellious subjects, Wu used the comments to enact reforms that she knew her people wanted – an act that led many of her subjects to believe that they were finally being listened to after being silenced for centuries.

> *"Today Wu is finally being recognised as one of China's greatest rulers"*

The public education system was also revised, with new teachers hired and an overhaul of teaching methods and the curriculum. Agricultural production was almost entirely rebuilt with officials who produced the most crops and taxed their people the least being rewarded. These changes were highly successful and agricultural production reached an all-time high.

The military began to be filled with competent soldiers instead of those with family ties and this paid off in the wars in Korea. Wu's reforms helped create a capable and deadly military force that had belief in its commanders. Her military systems were so admired and produced such good results that they were never challenged. China's borders were more secure than ever and Wu's spy network worked hard to squash any sniff of rebellion before it started. Thanks to her solid leadership, she ruled over a prosperous and stable country and her reign was one of the most peaceful that China had ever seen.

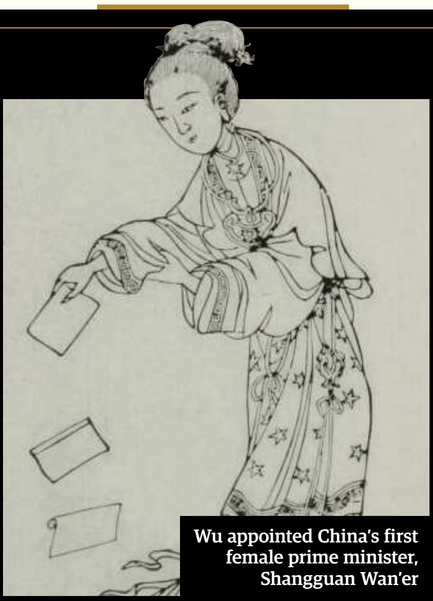
However, a lifetime of plotting and dodging her enemies' blades had made the empress paranoid. Historians would later claim that she was haunted by the corpses of Wang and Xiao, their bloody curses echoing in the dark. But Wu herself was distracted by a different kind of visitor entirely: handsome young men.

Far into her 60s and beyond, there is evidence that Wu took many young, handsome men as her lovers. This caused scandal but this type of thing had been going on for centuries – it was unacceptable because of her gender. Two lovers in particular, the Zhang brothers, irritated the court. Flamboyant and possibly gay, they held raucous parties with drugs. By 705, the court officials had enough and, with Wu in her 80s, they finally found themselves daring enough to go against her – the Zhang brothers were executed.

A younger Wu would have avenged the brothers three-fold to reassert her authority. But Wu was growing increasingly frail. Losing her grip on the court, Wu had no choice but to abdicate in favour of her son Ruizong, who had been biding his time in exile. While she retired to a life of lavish luxury, this was the end for Wu. She died that same year, much to the chagrin of her enemies, peacefully in bed.

Generations of scholars have argued over Wu, with some claiming she was a ruthless villain, stopping at nothing to cut down her enemies, and others believing her to be far more sympathetic. The issue surrounds the sources that were almost certainly biased against her. It's a problem that has emerged throughout the reigns of countless female leaders in history whose stories have largely been forgotten in history. However, today Wu is finally being recognised as one of China's greatest rulers. Although stories of her villainy, baby killing and mutilations are still difficult to shake – and may never truly be resolved – what we can rely on are facts.

Under Wu, China enjoyed a period of stability and affluence that it had never seen before. Her reforms were not removed after her death but kept in place, laying the foundations for China to become one of the most prosperous countries in the world – and that alone is certainly worth carving in stone. ◆



Wu appointed China's first female prime minister, Shangguan Wan'er

Wu's Blazing Trail

It is not unusual for women who have risen to the highest stations to go against their gender. Many female leaders throughout history have even felt obliged to deny it, such as Elizabeth I with her "heart and stomach of a king". However, Wu decided to use their newfound power not to praise the strength of men but instead elevate the position of women.

She instructed her scholars to write biographies of famous and accomplished women and led a group of women to perform traditionally male rituals at Mount Tai. Most notably, she promoted women to roles of influence within government, appointing the first female Chinese prime minister, Shangguan Wan'er.

Inspired by their strong, female leader, female poets and painters flourished. Many common women, who had been told their path was already set, began to question this and pursued careers that were previously closed to them. China benefited from this, establishing a vibrant culture of diversity.

Unfortunately, this would not last forever. When Wu died and the criticisms began, a dark mark was placed upon the name of women as rulers, or even people of influence, and 1,200 females were excluded from the public world and foot binding returned. It was safer, China decided, that women be quiet and look pretty.

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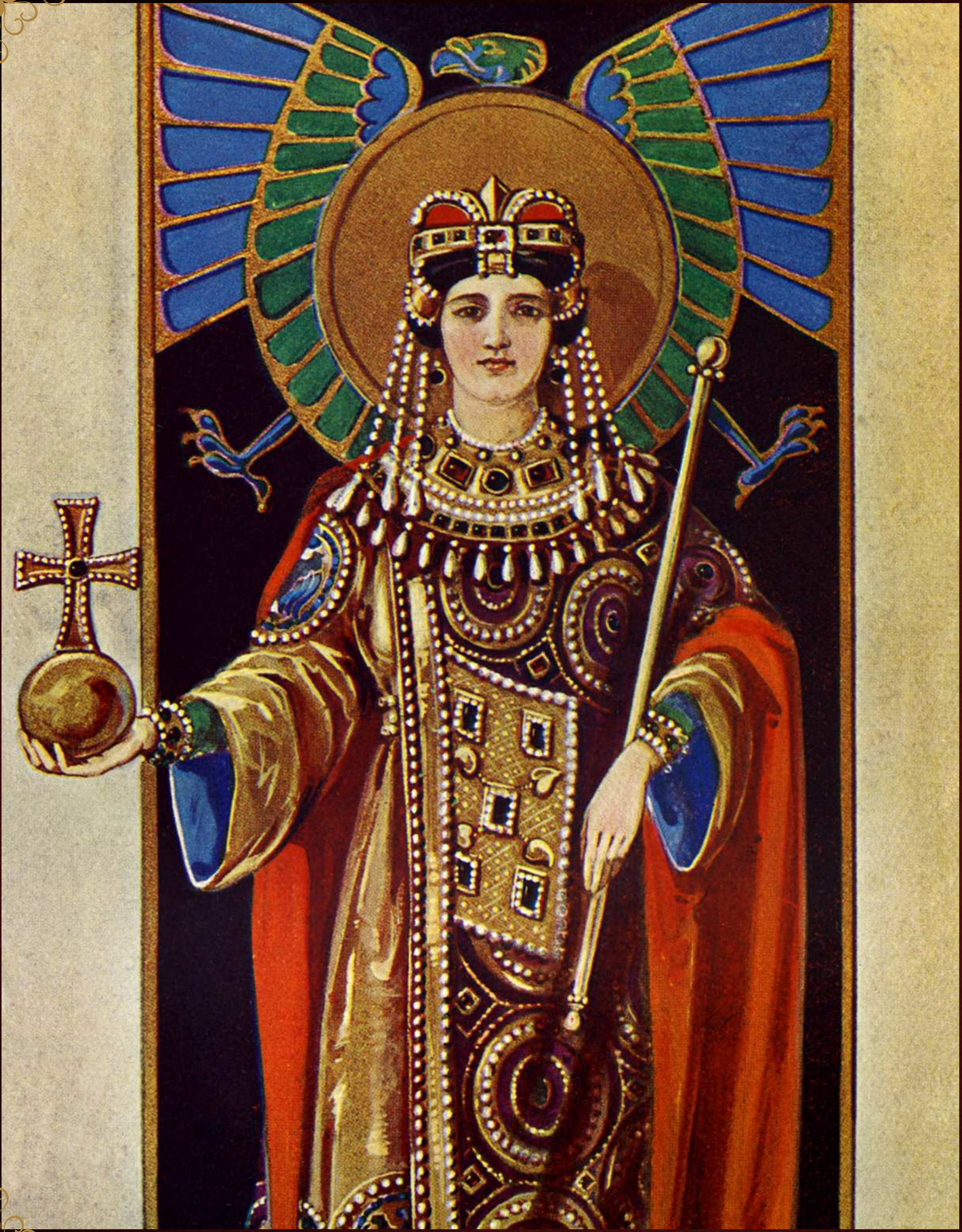


780 – 802 CE

EMPRESS IRENE

The controversial Byzantine empress who managed to rule on her own

Born into a noble Athenian family, Irene found her marriage arranged by the ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire himself, Constantine V. She was to marry his son, the future Leo IV, and they wed in 769 CE, with the birth of a son following just a year later.

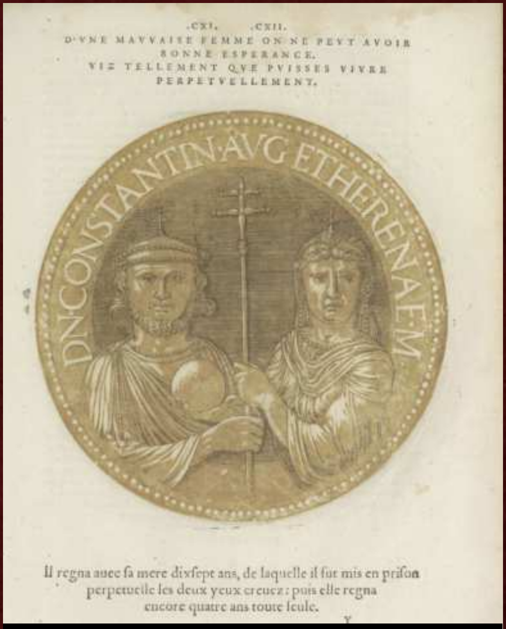
In 775, Constantine died and Leo ascended the throne, with Irene by his side as the empress consort. It would be a reign marred by conflict; Leo exiled his five half-brothers for challenging his position, while iconophiles and iconoclasts battled each other in the Orthodox Church (not helped by the Emperor's apparent side-switching). But just five years later, in 780, Leo died of a fever. The succession looked shaky - his son, Constantine, was only nine. So Irene stepped in.

Irene became regent for her son. Many in the Empire were irked - a woman could not sit in the Byzantine throne. Leo's half-brothers returned to try to reclaim what they thought was theirs, but Irene had a plan for them: they were ordained into the priesthood, so they would be ineligible to sit on the throne.

When Constantine reached his majority in 790, contention began once again - Irene wouldn't relinquish control. With the military on his side, Constantine did manage to oust his mother, but she retained the title of empress and she came back as co-ruler in 792. Five years later, Irene did something that would forever cement her legacy. Wanting power for herself, she captured her fleeing son and ordered his eyes to be gouged out. Constantine died soon after. When her late husband's half-brothers tried once again to rise against her, she had them blinded too.

Because the Byzantine Empire was now being solely ruled by a woman, Pope Leo III declared the throne vacant - Charlemagne was crowned and named emperor of the Romans in her place. Regardless, she would remain on the throne until 802, when she fell from power and was exiled to Lesbos. She is still remembered today as a saint in the Greek Orthodox Church, with a feast day on 9 August. Whether she deserves to be remembered in this way has been a point of debate for centuries.

> *"She captured her fleeing son and ordered his eyes be gouged out"*



.CXI. .CXII.

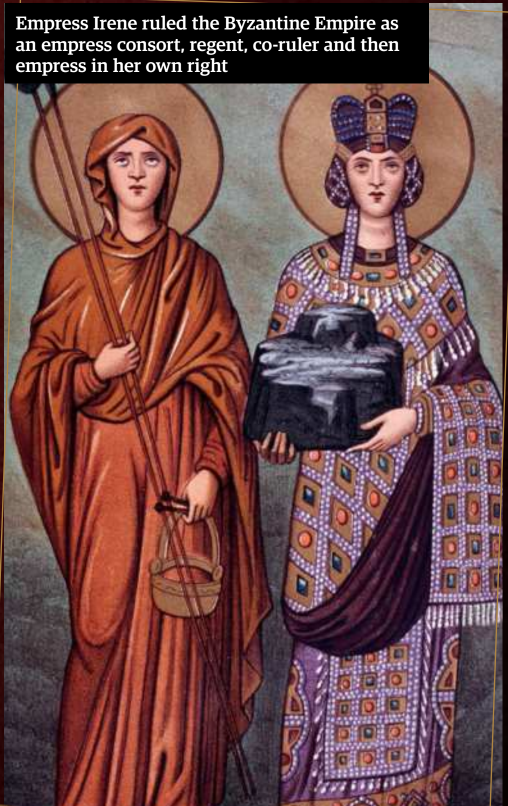
D'VNE MAVVAISE FEMME ON NE PEVT AVOIR BONNE ESPERANCE.

VIZ TELLEMENT QVE PVISSES VIVRE PERPETVELLEMENT.

DN CONSTANTIN AVG ET HERENAE M

Il regna auec ſa mere dixſept ans, de laquelle il fut mis en priſon perpetuelle les deux yeux creuez: puis elle regna encore quatre ans toute ſeule.

Portrait of Empress Irene alongside her son, Emperor Constantine VI



Empress Irene ruled the Byzantine Empire as an empress consort, regent, co-ruler and then empress in her own right

Irene on a gold solidus (coin), minted in Constantinople

© Alamy, Getty

1137 – 1204

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

Loathed, adored, celebrated and damned, she defied her gender, waged war and became the most powerful woman in Europe

When Pope Eugene III requested that Louis VII, king of France, lead a Crusade to help rescue the Crusader states in the Middle East, he took up the sword with enthusiasm. However, Louis would not travel to the Holy Land alone. His wife, adored by him, despised by others, did not plan to sit back and wait at home for her husband to return. Eleanor of Aquitaine's launch and involvement in the Second Crusade would go down in myth and legend. It is said that the queen rode through the streets of Vézelay dressed in the costume of an Amazon upon a white steed, brandishing her sword and urging the people to join her. Whether it truly occurred or not, this image of the warrior queen has survived through the centuries, and her enduring connection with the Second Crusade would see Eleanor damned for its failure.

When Eleanor fled to marry Henry, she had to avoid being kidnapped and forcibly married by his brother

Eleanor was born to rule. The first child of William X, Duke of Aquitaine, her doting father bestowed upon his eldest daughter an education fitting not a submissive queen, but one who would rule. Alongside general household skills and 'womanly' pursuits of embroidery and needlework, she also learned history and arithmetic, she could speak Latin, ride a horse proficiently and was a skilled hunter. She grew up in her grandfather William IX's court, surrounded by music, poetry, and most notably, courtly love. All this bred a girl who was lively, intelligent, confident and headstrong. These were not traits prized in ladies at the time, but they were essential for Eleanor, as she would soon become one of the most powerful heiresses in Europe.

Her only brother died in the spring of 1130, along with her mother. This left Eleanor as the heir presumptive of one of the largest domains in France, larger than those held even by the king. It would not take long for these kingdoms to fall into Eleanor's hands. In 1137, when Eleanor was aged approximately 15, her father went on pilgrimage and left his daughters in the care of the Archbishop of Bordeaux. However, on the journey home, he fell seriously ill and died. Poitou and Aquitaine were now clasped in the hands of a 15-year-old female heir.

All this control was a very dangerous thing for the young teenager to bear. Power-hungry men of the period were not above kidnapping eligible heiresses to seize their lands and claim a title. Eleanor's father knew this, and placed his daughter under the guardianship of King Louis VI of France, also known as Louis the Fat. William's will stipulated that Louis take care of his daughter and her lands until a suitable husband was found. Mortally ill and so obese he was confined ▶

Guide to the Crusades

From 1096 to 1291, Jerusalem was at the epicentre of a war that killed millions

1st

1096-99

LEVANT, ANATOLIA

As Turkish forces gained control of the Holy Land, Pope Urban II called for a Crusade to eliminate the threat. Gradually the Christian forces reclaimed Jerusalem. They also began to set up Latin Christian states in the region.

Victors: Crusaders

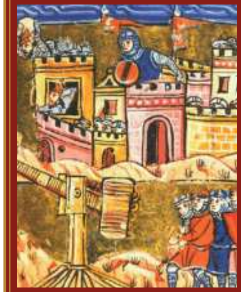
2nd

1147-49

IBERIA, HOLY LAND, EGYPT

When Edessa, fell, Pope Eugene III encouraged the monarchies of France and Germany to wage war. However, both armies were defeated by the Turks amid claims the Byzantine emperor plotted against the Crusaders.

Victors: Muslims



3rd

1189-92

LEVANT, ANATOLIA

After Jerusalem was conquered by Saladin, Richard I of England and King Philip II of France united to claim it back. They enjoyed a string of successes, notably in the cities of Acre and Jaffa, but failed to capture Jerusalem.

Victors: Mostly Crusaders

4th

1202-04

BALKANS

With Jerusalem still under Muslim control, the Fourth Crusade was launched. Although the aim had been to claim Jerusalem, the Crusaders instead sacked Constantinople, beginning the decline of the Byzantine Empire.

Victors: Crusaders

5th

1213-21

LEVANT, EGYPT

With Hungarian and Austrian armies failing to conquer Jerusalem, Flemish and Frisian forces attempt to claim Ayyubid and prevent the Crusaders having to fight on two fronts. The attack was repelled with huge Crusader losses.

Victors: Muslims

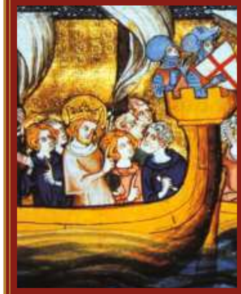
6th

1228-29

CYPRUS, NEAR EAST

With the aim to reclaim Jerusalem, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II used diplomacy and lies to obtain Jerusalem in exchange for a ten-year truce with the Sultan of Egypt. Jerusalem was in Crusader hands.

Victors: Crusaders



7th

1248-54

AL-MANSOURAH, EGYPT

In 1244, Jerusalem returned to Muslim control, so Louis IX of France led a Crusade to get it back. Although they enjoyed initial success, the Crusader forces were defeated and Louis himself captured and ransomed.

Victors: Muslims

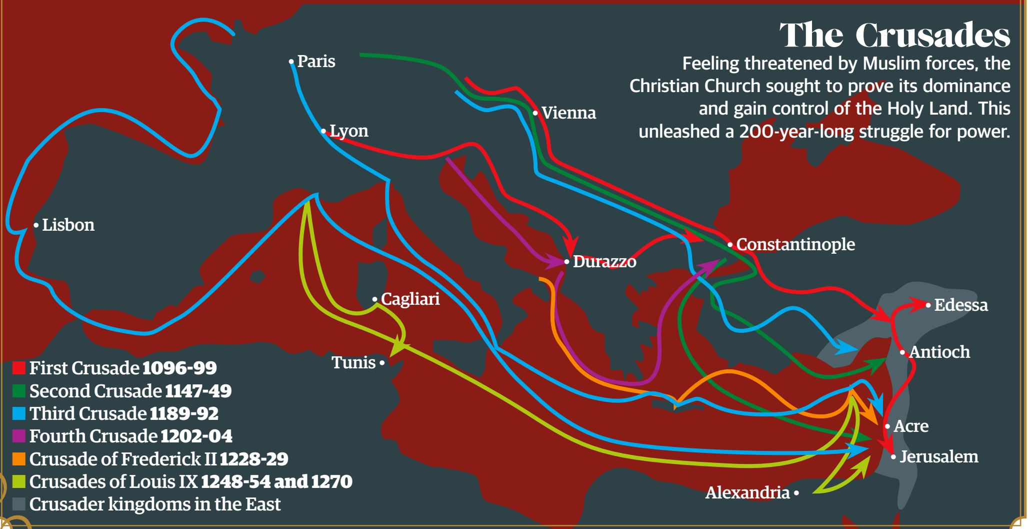
8th/9th

1270-72

TUNISIA, NEAR EAST

Louis IX launched a final attempt to reclaim the Holy Land, but became ill on the journey and died. This prompted Edward I to sail to Acre, where he enjoyed victories, but he was forced home to solve conflicts there.

Victors: Muslims



The Crusades

Feeling threatened by Muslim forces, the Christian Church sought to prove its dominance and gain control of the Holy Land. This unleashed a 200-year-long struggle for power.

to his bed, Louis was very aware of his own impending mortality and did not intend to waste this opportunity. Within hours, Louis arranged for Eleanor to be married to his son, Prince Louis, bringing her ample lands under the control of the French crown.

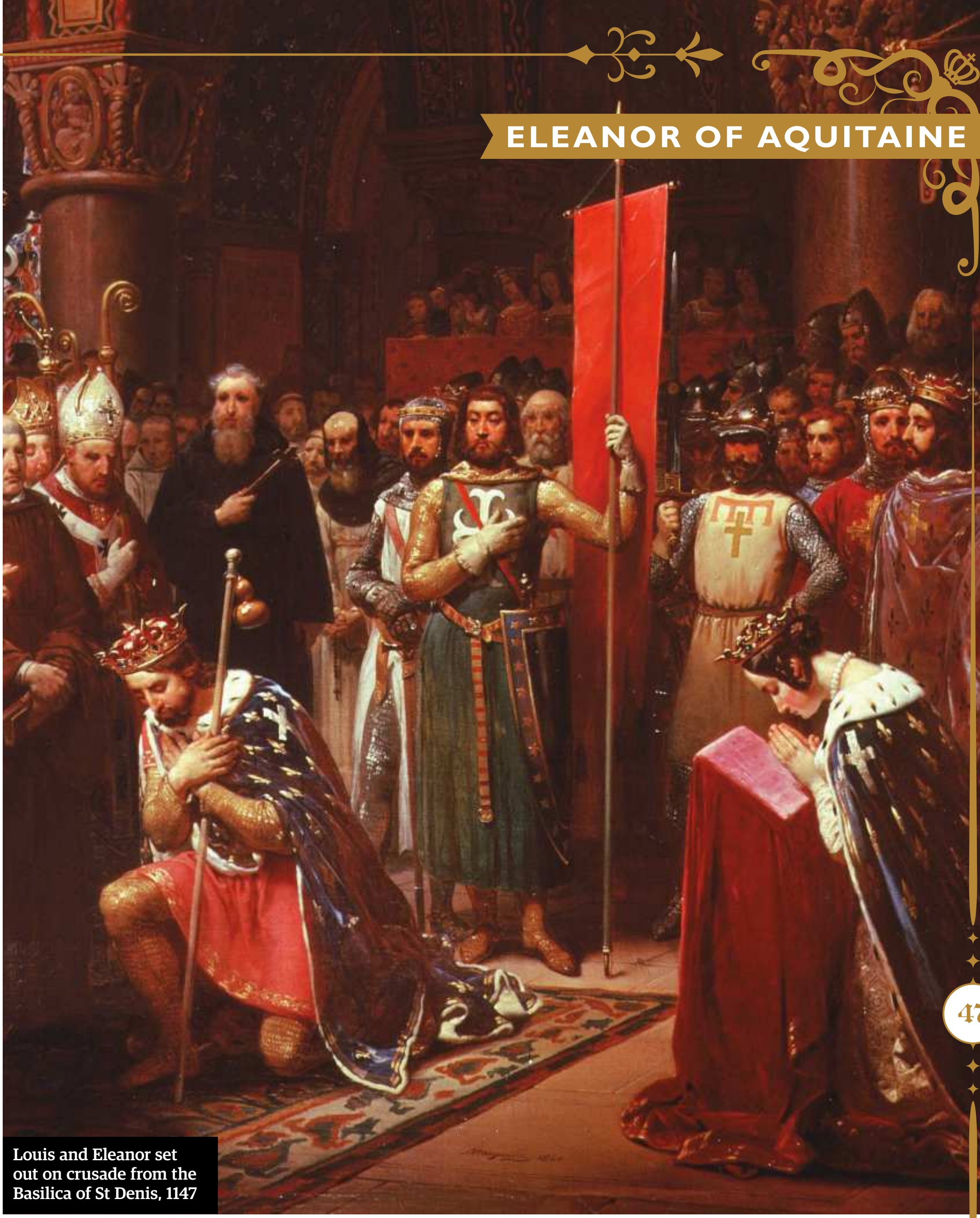
Louis the Fat married Eleanor off to his son confident in her suitability as a wife. Not only did she come with lands that greatly strengthened the French crown, she was also stunningly beautiful, young, fertile and a lady of court. However, Eleanor was anything but a quiet, submissive wife. Prince Louis was a very pious, meek man, a younger son intended originally for a monastic life, but Eleanor had been trained to rule. She had knowledge beyond her husband's, she was strong where he was weak, forceful where he was relenting, and he was completely and utterly besotted with her. As expected, Louis the Fat shortly died, the prince became King Louis VII and Eleanor became queen of the Franks. Her colourful and high-spirited nature was not well-liked in the royal court, and Louis's own mother loathed her daughter-in-law, believing her to be a bad influence on her son. However, as much as Eleanor's unusual behaviour confused and infuriated the king, he could not resist bending to her every desire.

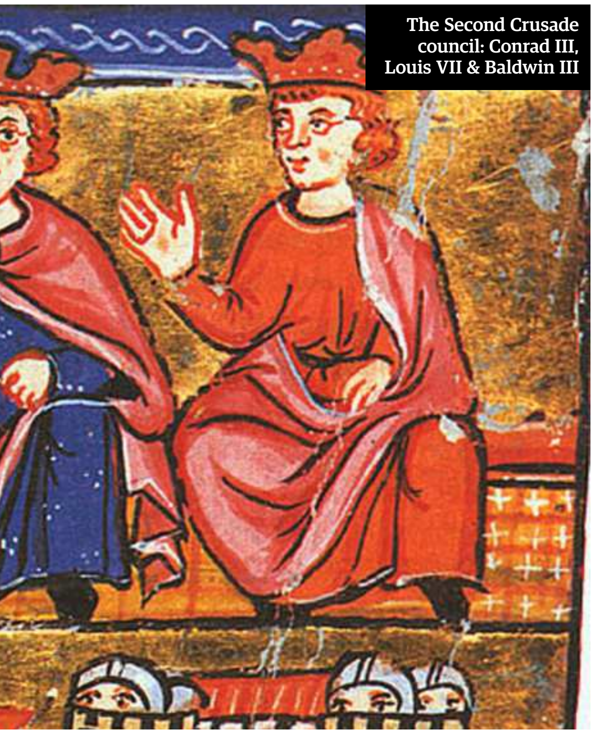
Sensitive and pious he may have been, but Louis was a king, and a king in the Medieval era could not avoid war. An illicit affair involving Eleanor's younger sister, Petronella, with Raoul I of Vermandois - then married to the daughter of the powerful Stephen of Blois - caused war to break out. With Eleanor's encouragement, Louis supported Petronella and Raoul, and in the resulting conflict, the king was responsible for the burning of the town of Vitry. The terrified townspeople sought refuge in a church, but it also

“She had knowledge beyond her husband’s, she was strong where he was weak”

burned to the ground and more than 1,000 people were lost in the flames. The event would have a profound effect on the sensitive Louis, who was plagued by his guilty conscience and the eternal screams of the dying. What Louis needed was a pilgrimage to clear his conscience, and luckily for him, a trip to the Holy Land was just on the horizon, though it would not be quite as peaceful as he hoped. In the autumn of 1145, Pope Eugene III called upon Louis to lead a Crusade to protect the Crusader-owned kingdom of Jerusalem. The king obliged, but he would not be waging war alone.

Eleanor not only decided to join her husband on Crusade, but took up the Crusader cross with, likely, more enthusiasm than he himself. Aged 19, she offered the church the aid of her fighting vassals, which they were very happy to accept. However, they were less than pleased when she proclaimed that she, accompanied by 300 of her ladies in waiting, would join the Crusaders. Eleanor said that she and her ladies would help tend the wounded, but it is also likely that the headstrong queen was not so keen on her meek husband fighting a war without her. She appointed herself leader of her soldiers and departed with her husband.


Louis and Eleanor set out on crusade from the Basilica of St Denis, 1147


The Second Crusade council: Conrad III, Louis VII & Baldwin III

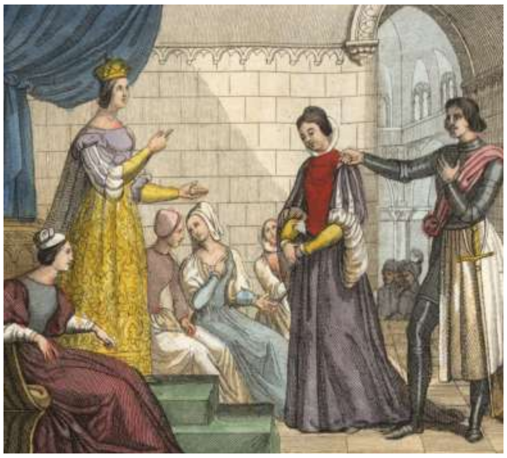
The women were dressed in armour and carried lances, but did not fight. Nevertheless, the prospect of 300 women riding off with warriors was looked upon suspiciously by her contemporaries. However, Eleanor was not one to be swayed by criticism. Although the church may not have approved of her, when the army reached Constantinople, the warrior queen quickly impressed, and was compared to the mythical queen of the Amazons.

Unfortunately, the Crusade was not going smoothly. The French had been told by the Byzantine Emperor that their ally, the German King Conrad, had enjoyed victory against a Turkish army. However, as the French army continued their journey, a dazed and ailing Conrad was found near their camp and revealed the truth. The Europeans hadn’t won, in fact they had been massacred. It was with haste and some unease that the French and what remained of the German army headed to Antioch, where Eleanor’s uncle ruled.

Little did the Crusaders know they were already being stalked by Turks. The French monarchs decided to split, with Louis at the rear of the column with the baggage trains and Eleanor at the front with her vassal, Geoffrey de Rancon. Although the vanguard was able to reach the summit where they planned to make camp, Rancon decided to continue onwards. The rear of the column, laden down with baggage, struggled to keep up and the Turks leapt on this opportunity. The French, including many unarmed pilgrims, were trapped and unprepared. Any who tried to escape were killed, and the king, disguised in simple pilgrim clothes, barely escaped the attack by scaling a rock.

The blame for the massacre was placed firmly at de Rancon’s feet, and, as he was Eleanor’s vassal, so it was at hers. The fact that her own soldiers had marched in front and weren’t involved did little to help her popularity, and it was even argued that the majority of the baggage was hers. Thus, despite having no involvement in the fight, the queen was blamed for the disaster. Tensions between the royal couple were reaching a fever pitch.

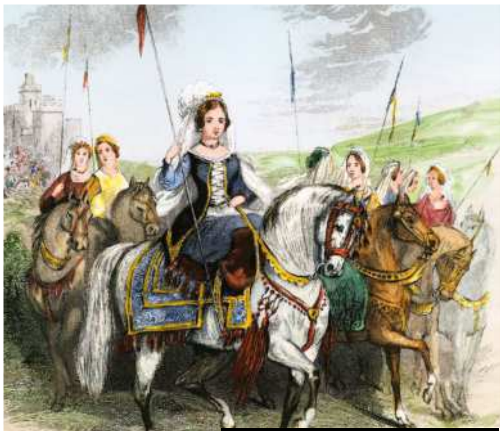
When the Crusaders reached the city of Antioch, Eleanor renewed her friendship with the lord of the city and her uncle, Raymond. Not only was Raymond close in age to Eleanor, but he was also tall, handsome and charming. In fact, she spent so much time with her uncle that rumours quickly spread about an illicit affair ▶



The Court of Love

AS WELL AS A CRUSADER QUEEN, ELEANOR WAS AN EXPERT IN THE ART OF COURTLY LOVE

In 1168, Henry II escorted Eleanor to the court of Poitiers, where she remained until 1173. Her time there would profoundly affect the culture of the period. Historians today still debate what exactly unfurled in this 'Court of Love', with some believing that Eleanor, her daughter Marie and other prominent women of the time presided over it as jury. They would listen to lovers' quarrels, resolve them, and seek answers to questions concerning love. 21 different cases have been recorded, debating issues such as whether true love can actually exist within a marriage, with the women concluding it was unlikely. The legend of this courtly love has evolved into the notion that Eleanor was responsible for bringing the ideas of chivalry and courtly love together. However, this is unlikely, as courtly love as a concept was already blossoming before Eleanor's court. It is more likely that the court at Poitiers popularised the idea of courtly love.



Eleanor launched the Crusade from the rumoured location of Mary Magdalene's grave

between the two. Raymond suggested they first capture Edessa, a strategic stronghold in the Holy Land, but Louis was determined to focus solely on Jerusalem. When Eleanor supported her uncle, it was the final straw – the meek, adoring and abiding king had reached his limit.

Louis, likely for the first time in his marriage, demanded that Eleanor follow him. His queen, outraged, called into question the entire marriage, claiming that she and her husband were too closely related, and this was grounds for divorce. This didn't go down well with Louis, and in an effort to establish his authority, he took Eleanor away from her uncle and Antioch against her will and headed to Jerusalem. For the woman who was born to rule, to command and to control, this was humiliating beyond all measure. The remainder of the Crusade achieved little, Louis's subsequent assault on Damascus was a failure, and the royal couple returned to France in different ships.

A marriage where Eleanor was expected to be meek and obliging was not going to work. She could deal with her sensitive and generous husband, but the one that returned from the Crusade was as humiliated as her and increasingly suspicious of the growing relationship between niece and uncle. With no male children together, and Louis faced increasing opposition to Eleanor from his barons. The king was left with no option, and in 1152, the marriage was annulled. The lands that Louis's father had so slyly secured for his son were torn away from him, and aged about 30, Eleanor once again became one of the most eligible and desirable heiresses in Europe.

However, Eleanor was no longer a naive 15-year-old, she was a worldly and knowledgeable woman. She knew she would have to remarry, and she intended to do so on her own terms. Amid several attempts of kidnap and forced marriage, she manufactured her own union with Henry, Duke of Normandy and future king of England. Henry wasn't stupid either; he travelled immediately to visit Eleanor, and within eight weeks of her annulment to Louis, she was married to a man even more closely related to her than Louis.

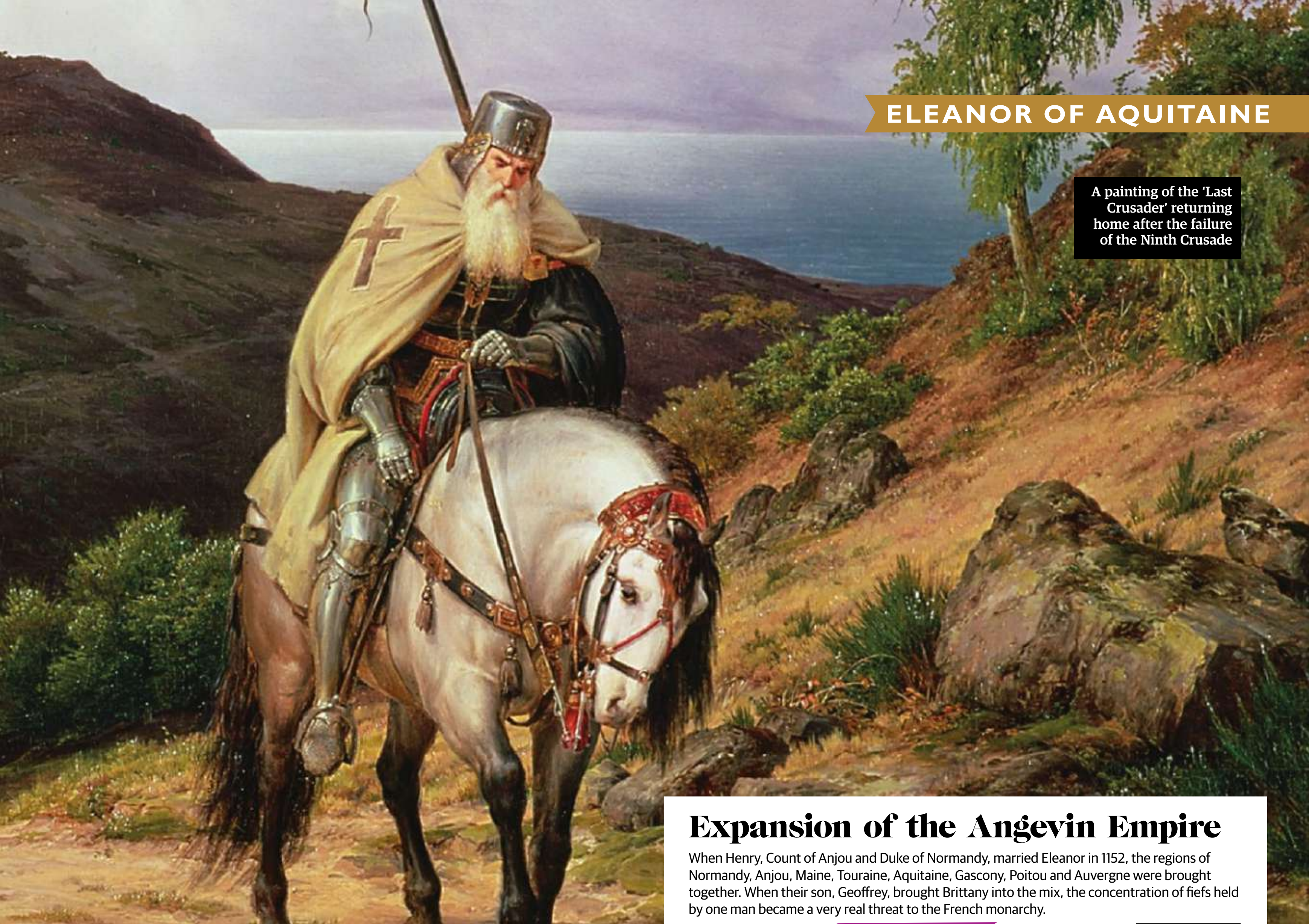
On paper the union was a powerful one. In 1154, Henry became Henry II, king of England, and his lands combined with Eleanor's. This united England, Normandy and the West of France into a hugely powerful and influential kingdom. However, both Henry and Eleanor were strong, dominating characters. Henry was the eldest child; he too had been born to rule. He was used to getting his way and had an explosive temper. Eleanor was 11 years older than him, knew her worth, and wasn't prepared to obey the commands of a domineering husband. Despite their stormy relationship, the couple had five sons and three daughters, and ruled over an impressive Medieval empire.

However, a storm was brewing. Henry was ruled by passion, and this led to many illicit affairs and a number of mistresses. His affair with one mistress in particular, Rosamund Clifford, became public knowledge and drove his proud and headstrong wife to breaking point. Eleanor departed for her native land of Aquitaine and took several of her children, including Richard, her chosen heir, with her. The queen was tired of dealing with the wills of husbands; she wanted to rule Aquitaine, and she wanted to rule alone.

Eleanor wasn't the only one who had been pushed to the limit by Henry. Several of her sons had inherited her proud, stubborn nature and decided that enough was enough. Henry the younger secretly travelled to Aquitaine and, likely encouraged by Eleanor, joined with two of his brothers, Richard and Geoffrey. Together they decided to rebel against their father. For Eleanor the rebellion was the culmination of years of abiding his infidelities, bearing his children and a lifetime of sharing power; it was her chance to rule Aquitaine with her beloved son Richard. But, as always with Eleanor, fate did not run smooth. The rebellion was squashed, and the woman born to rule was thrown in prison.

For the next 16 years Eleanor was imprisoned in England. If the humiliation wasn't bad enough, the lack of contact with her sons over the years caused Eleanor to become distanced from them. Now aged 50, Eleanor hopelessly and powerlessly waited for her chance to rule again. It would take the death of her tempestuous husband for her to finally glimpse freedom once more.

When Henry died in 1189, Richard I became heir. Although Eleanor's favourite son had become more distant, one of his first acts was to release his mother from prison. In the autumn of her life, Eleanor could finally fulfil the role she was born to play – ruler. While Richard, who would become known as Richard the Lionheart, travelled and embarked on the Third Crusade, she ruled England as regent. She defended his lands, and even used



A painting of the 'Last Crusader' returning home after the failure of the Ninth Crusade

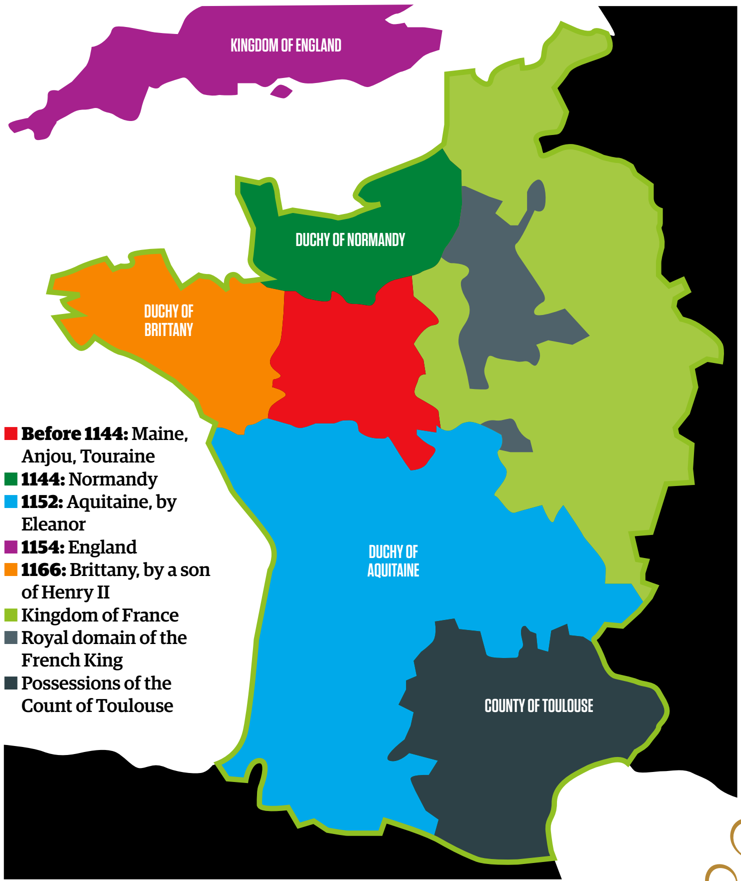
her political acumen to negotiate Richard's release when he was captured. Her citizens approved of their able, intelligent and strong queen, and, although it was likely no concern to her, Eleanor finally earned popularity.

The queen did not let old age stop her. She continually travelled across Europe, cementing powerful marriages for her children, managing her army and building a strong and influential empire. At the age of 70, she rode over the Pyrenees to collect her choice of wife for Richard, then continued to traverse the Alps. She outlived nearly all of her children, and survived long into the reign of her youngest son, John. She eventually retired to the religious house of Fontevraud where she became a nun. In 1204, aged 82, Eleanor died and was buried beside Richard. Her legacy continued not only with her children, but in her lands, which remained loyal to England even after the loss of Normandy. Though many were quick to discount her for her frivolity in her youth, she had proved herself an intelligent, driven and wise ruler. As the nuns who spent her final years with her wrote, she was a queen "who surpassed almost all the queens of the world." ◆

Eleanor's effigy can still be seen in Fontevraud Abbey in France

Expansion of the Angevin Empire

When Henry, Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy, married Eleanor in 1152, the regions of Normandy, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Aquitaine, Gascony, Poitou and Auvergne were brought together. When their son, Geoffrey, brought Brittany into the mix, the concentration of fiefs held by one man became a very real threat to the French monarchy.



- 🟥 **Before 1144:** Maine, Anjou, Touraine
- 🟩 **1144:** Normandy
- 🟦 **1152:** Aquitaine, by Eleanor
- 🟪 **1154:** England
- 🟧 **1166:** Brittany, by a son of Henry II
- 🟩 Kingdom of France
- ⬛ Royal domain of the French King
- ⬛ Possessions of the Count of Toulouse

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1184 – 1213

TAMAR THE GREAT

Tamar the Great presided over Georgia as a female king, becoming the country's first woman to rule in her own right

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

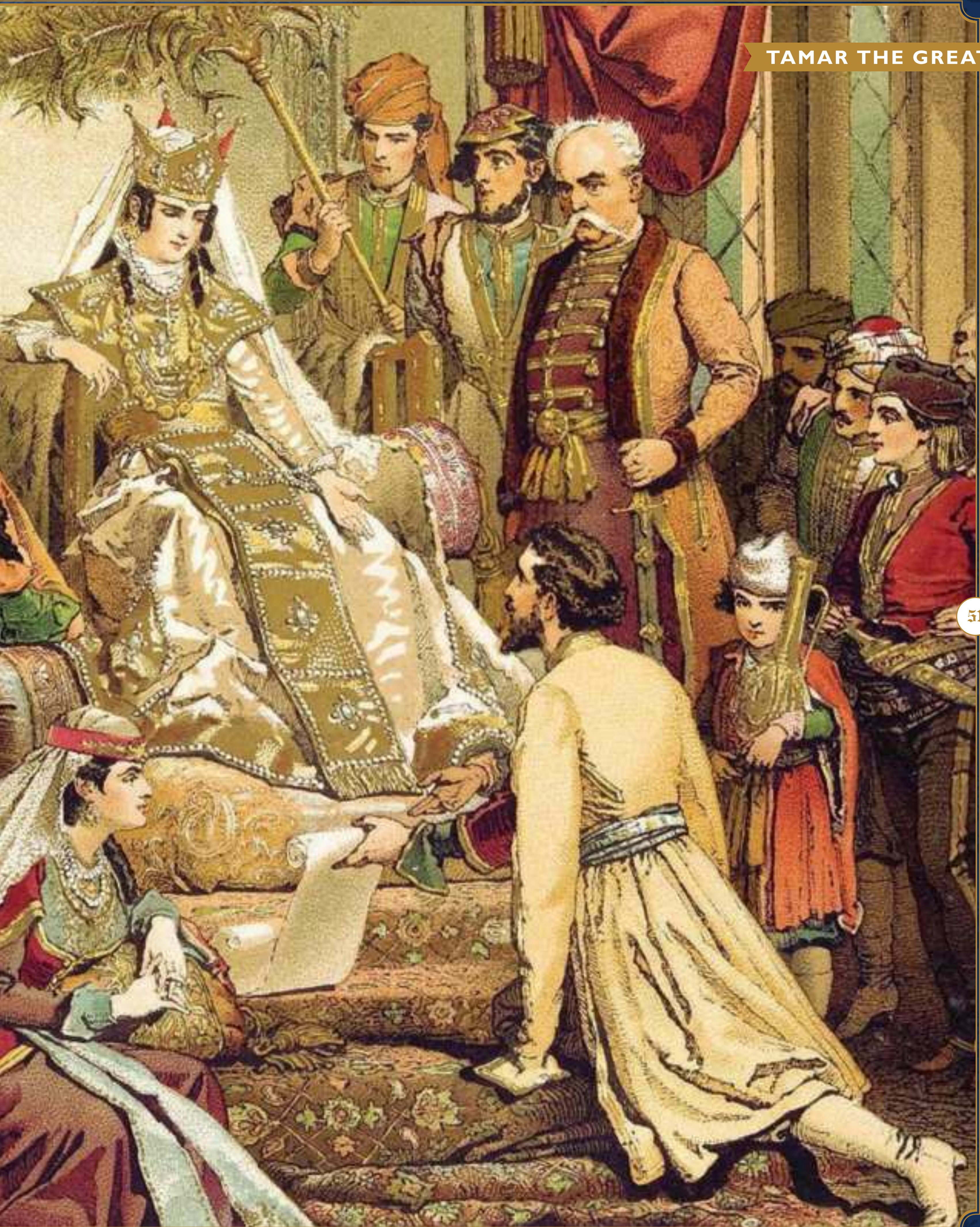
Tamar the Great, the ground-breaking queen of Georgia, was born to royal privilege in 1160. She was the daughter of King George III of Georgia, and Burdukhan, daughter of a neighbouring monarch. Her birth came during the Georgian Golden Age, a time when the country was enjoying unparalleled might and development. Yet though Tamar's birth was illustrious, her youth was not. When she was just 17, an uprising of nobles threatened to dethrone her father in favour of his nephew, who they believed to be the rightful heir to the Georgian throne. Fearing that any show of weakness would be catastrophic to his reign, George III met the threat with the hardest of lines. He smashed the rebellion, putting its leaders to death and punishing his nephew with castration and blindness. The unfortunate pretender to the throne didn't survive his punishment, and those nobles who dared doubt their king learned a hard lesson indeed.

Watchful for further threats and alert to the danger facing the future succession of his dynastic line, George took action. He named his daughter, Tamar, as co-ruler, securing the succession of his bloodline and allowing her a hands-on role, rather than one in name only. Six years after Tamar had joined her father's government, King George III died. Tamar succeeded him, becoming the first woman to rule Georgia in her own right. She was known as mep'et'a mep'e, which translates as king of kings. Just as nobles had threatened the reign of George III, now they questioned that of his daughter and they believed, wrongly, that a young female, not to mention the first woman to rule, would be far easier to deal with than the king had been. In fact, Tamar proved herself to be her father's daughter in every sense. Those half dozen years as co-ruler had been the making of her, and by the time she succeeded to the crown she was a more than capable monarch.

Georgian culture and art flourished during Tamar's reign thanks to the patronage of her and her court

Perhaps most importantly of all, Tamar knew when to use force and when to use diplomacy, and as those nobles raised questions of her legitimacy, she shored up her position thanks to influential family members and the crucial support of Georgia's Catholicos-Patriarch, Michael IV. Yet the wily cleric didn't lend his weight to her campaign out of charity, but in return for the central and senior office of chancellor.

As long as Michael IV served as chancellor, Tamar knew that he would be a thorn in her side. Despite this, she was willing to make such concessions to secure her reign, for she recognised that a potentially long and hard road stretched ahead of her. In order to stave of a possible ▶



rebellion, Tamar also grudgingly agreed to dismiss many of the appointees who had supported her father in crushing the earlier attempted coup. Tamar attempted to limit the damage of these concessions by bringing in measures to quell the power of the noble elite, but her attempts failed. It was a lesson well-learned; Tamar would not make concessions forever, but she would have to make some for now.

As a single woman, the question of who would be Tamar's husband and provide her with an heir to the throne was one that the nobles were determined to settle. There was no question that a woman could lead the army, so whoever they selected would have to take that role too. The elite group of nobles eventually settled on Yuri, son of the murdered Prince Andrei I Bogolyubsky of Vladimir-Suzdal. Tamar agreed to the match, but it soon became apparent that she had made a mistake. Though he might have been a talented soldier, Yuri was a violent drunk who routinely abused Tamar. The marriage was a turning point in Tamar's life - she knew that she had to consolidate her power before it slipped from her grasp altogether.

Luckily for Tamar, fate was on her side. Michael IV, the Catholicos-Patriarch and chancellor who wielded power of church and state, died. Tamar swiftly replaced him with Anton Gnolistavisdze, a loyalist who she knew would protect her interests. It was the first building block in what would become a great reign of Georgia's Golden Age, and bit by bit she began to replace the officials who had been imposed upon her with her own candidates, consolidating and strengthening her power with the installation of members of the powerful Mkhargrdzeli and Toreli families, whose support would prove invaluable against those noble families who opposed her rule.

After just two years of marriage, Tamar used this newly-appointed council of loyalist nobles to give her unwanted husband the heave-ho, and a divorce was granted on the grounds of alcoholism and sodomy. Yuri was exiled and sent to Constantinople, resurfacing only to make a couple of failed coup attempts. With her unwanted husband out of the way and her opponents removed from influence, Tamar the Great could finally rule as she pleased, and she would choose her own husband too.

"Tamar is remembered as one of the greatest monarchs Georgia has ever known"

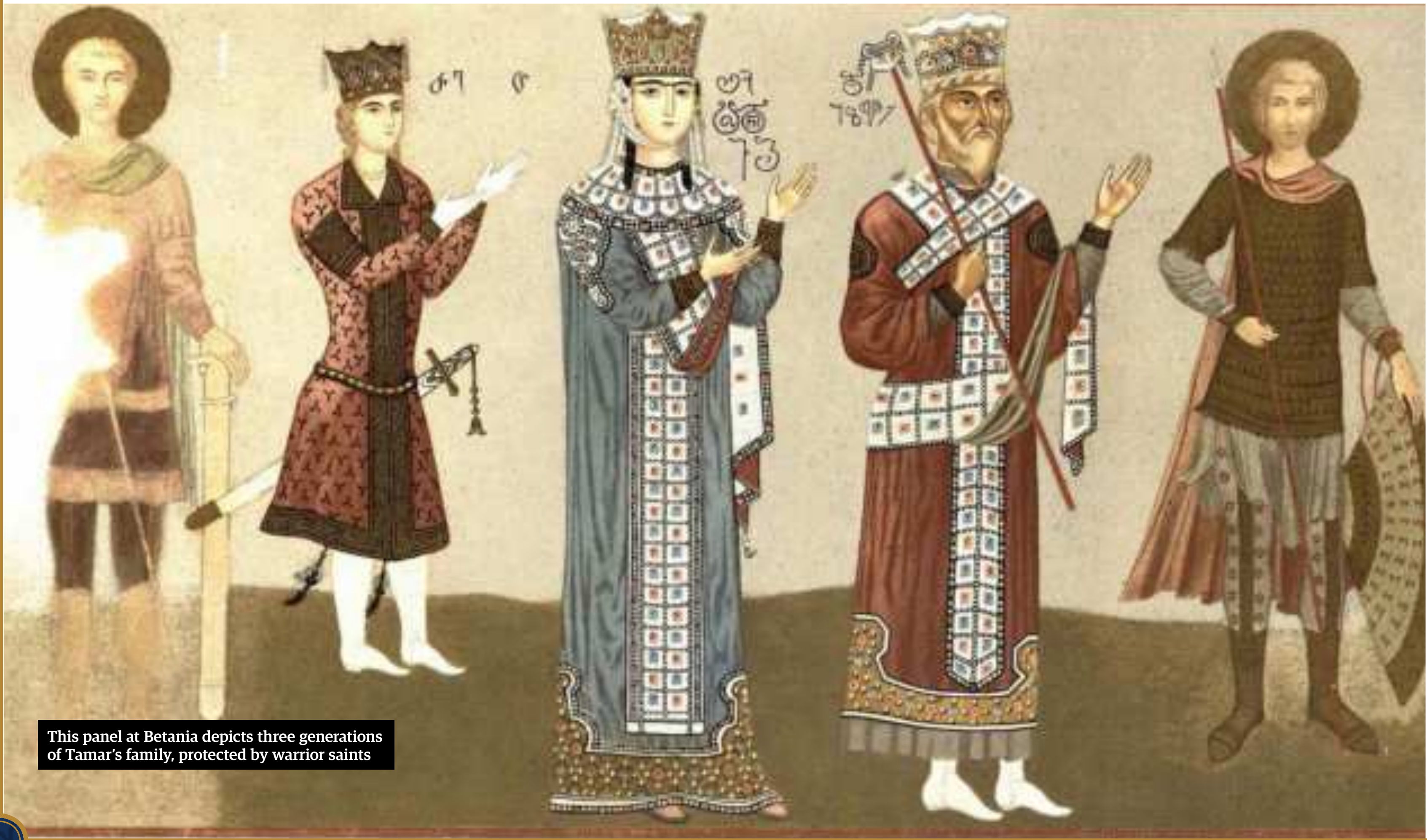
A coin issued in the name of Tamar and David in 1200

HUSBAND #2

Tamar the Great's first marriage was a disaster; her second would be anything but

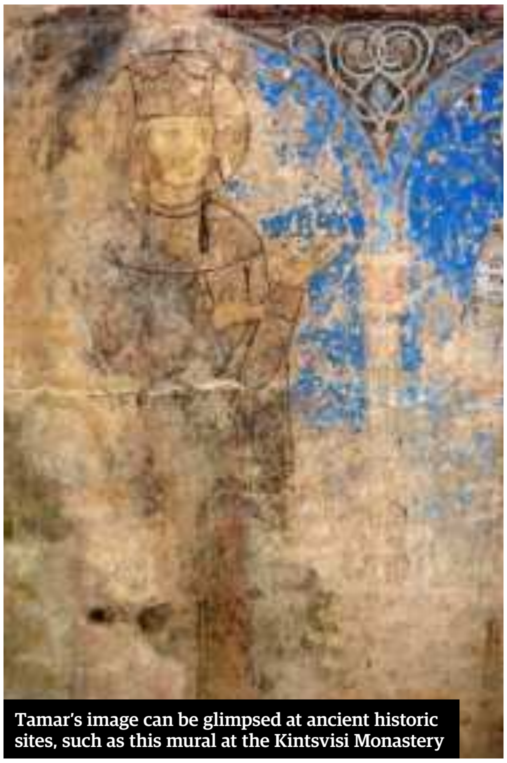
Tamar's first husband was selected for her by a council of elite nobles who put their own interests ahead of those of their queen. They wanted a soldier who would dance to their tune, and Tamar ended up with a violent drunk who she was eventually able to divorce. For her second marriage, she selected David Soslan, a Christian prince from Alania.

David and Tamar were married around 1187 and from that day, he was fiercely loyal to his wife. David Soslan fathered two children with Tamar and commanded Georgian forces as his bride's empire expanded. He led successful raids against key targets, securing Georgia's growth and power with each new campaign. Though he was a king, David sought no power or influence and was satisfied to remain as his wife's defender and consort. He died in 1207, and his widow did not remarry.



This panel at Betania depicts three generations of Tamar's family, protected by warrior saints

Tamar the Great was crowned at the Gelati Monastery, and known as king of kings



Tamar's image can be glimpsed at ancient historic sites, such as this mural at the Kintsvisi Monastery

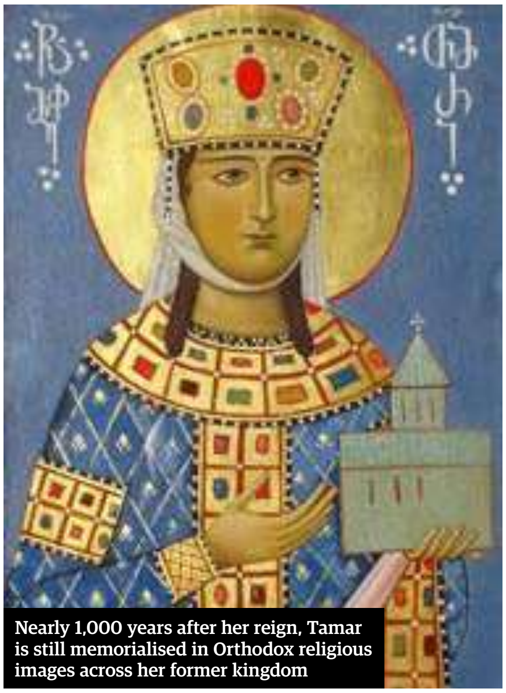
Tamar married for the second time at the age of 31, four years after Yuri had been exiled from court. She chose as her spouse David Soslan, a prince of Alania who was descended from Georgia's King George I. Just like Prince Yuri, David was a talented soldier, but that was where the similarities ended. David Soslan was loyal to his wife in all things and, unlike his predecessor, had no designs on power. As the husband of the monarch he was king, but he remained subordinate, recognising his place as his wife's consort rather than as a ruler in his own right.

Tamar and David had two children, a son and a daughter; both of them would go on to rule Georgia in the years to come. Surrounded by those she could trust and with her enemies struggling to find a foothold in Georgia's administration, Tamar turned her efforts towards expansion. Once, Georgia had been a nation to be reckoned with, but internal struggles had slowed down the nation's achievements. Tamar, however, renewed the work of her father and those generations that had gone before, and began to make in-roads into the territories that surrounded Georgia with the ultimate aim of capturing Armenia.

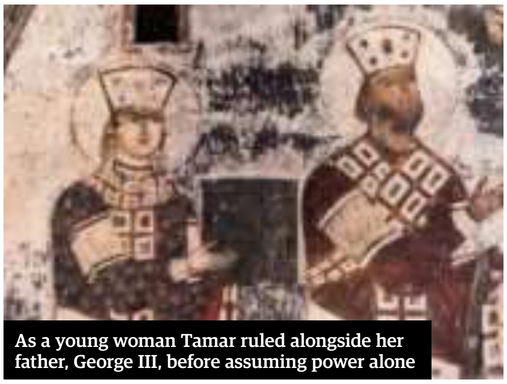
When Tamar's forces threatened the territory of the Eldiguzids and Shirvanshahs, their efforts at staving off disaster failed. Bit by bit Georgia pressed closer to Armenia, its Christian armies doing battle with Muslim forces as fortresses fell before the invading troops, reclaimed by Georgian rule. For years the Georgian army under the command of David Soslan pushed towards Armenia, winning hard-fought battles at every turn. The campaign stalled when Ivane Mkhargrdzeli, an important Georgian general, was captured by al-Awhad, the emir of Jazira. In return for their general's release, Tamar was forced to agree to a three-decade truce, effectively meaning that her path into Armenian territory was blocked. However, it wasn't the end of Georgia's expansion. Instead, the loyalist Mkhargrzeli brothers marched through the lands Georgia had already claimed to pillage those on the other side, allowing Georgia to expand further than had seemed likely when the truce was struck. Tamar's leadership had expanded far beyond the kingdom she had inherited and she now sat at the pinnacle of a Christian empire. The era of Tamar the Great had arrived.

> In 1204, Tamar founded the Empire of Trebizond and Georgia was at its greatest size during her reign

Money flooded into Georgia and pilgrims and commerce flooded out, leading to the proliferation of Georgian culture. Tamar the Great ruled for just short of 30 years and died in 1213. Today she is remembered as one of the greatest monarchs Georgia has ever known and the defender of the Christian faith, as well as a woman who far exceeded what her sceptical opponents believed any female could be capable of. More recently, Tamar the Great has appeared in works of literature and even computer games, whilst in the land of her birth, she has been canonised as a saint. She is celebrated for her wisdom, faith and courage, and truly deserving of the name by which she was honoured: Tamar the Great.



Nearly 1,000 years after her reign, Tamar is still memorialised in Orthodox religious images across her former kingdom



As a young woman Tamar ruled alongside her father, George III, before assuming power alone

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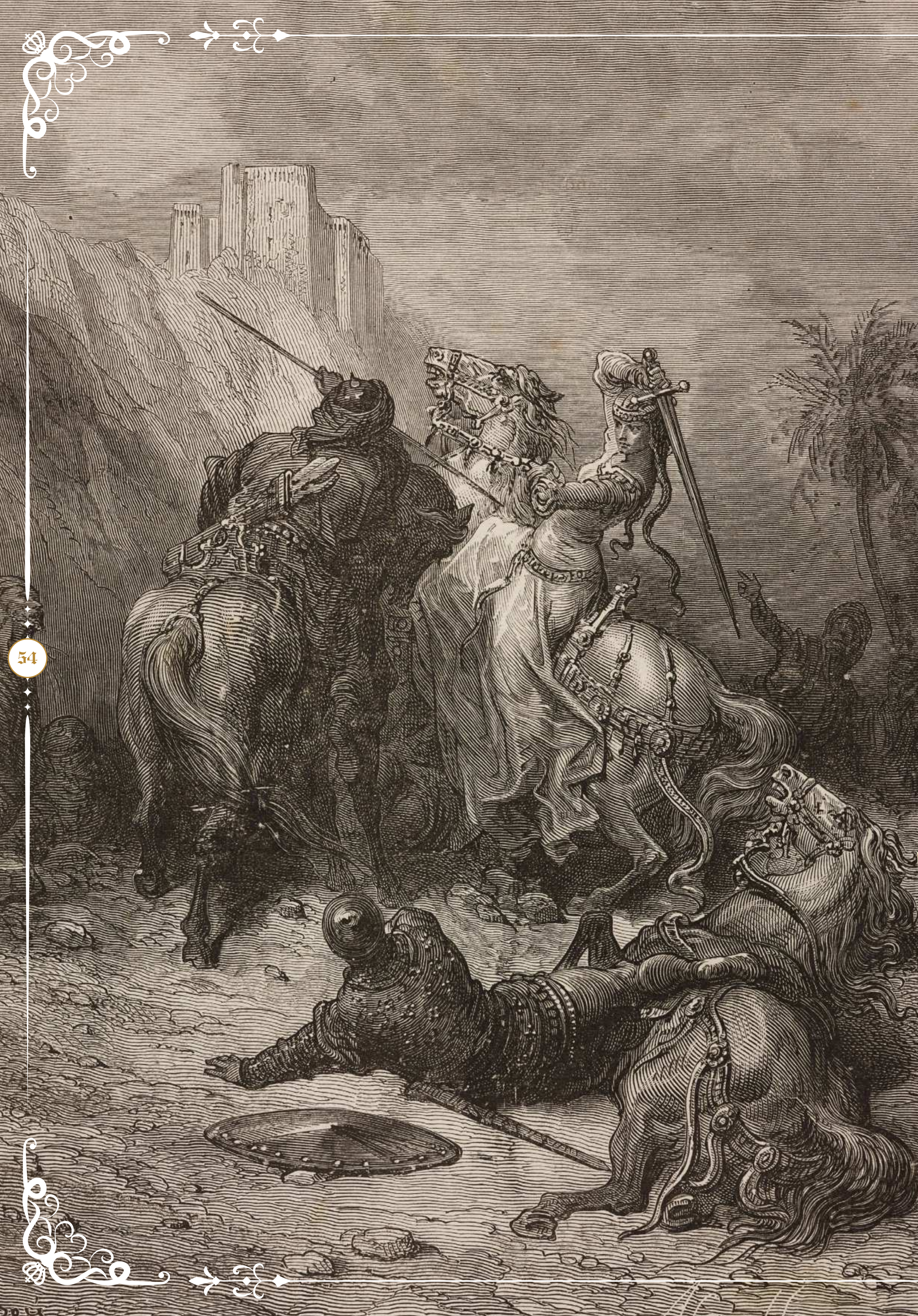


1186 – 1190

SIBYLLA, QUEEN OF JERUSALEM

A queen who refused to leave her husband's side despite the consequences

The early years of Sibylla's life were marred with family conflict. Her parents were forced to separate for her father, Amalric, to take the throne of Bethlehem. Her mother, Agnes, was sent away, leaving Sibylla and her brother Baldwin under Amalric's control. While Baldwin stayed at court to learn the art of being a ruler, Sibylla was sent to a convent nearby and saw very little of any of her family.

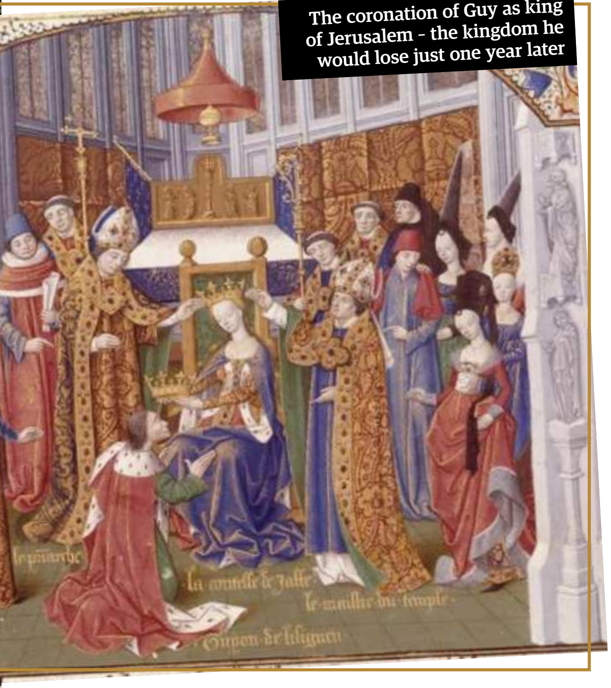
Things took a turn in the 1160s when it was becoming more apparent that Baldwin had leprosy - it was unlikely he'd live to adulthood, let alone have legitimate heirs. The answer was simple: ten-year-old Sibylla needed a husband. It took six years for a husband to be found - William Marquis de Montferrat - and a teenage Baldwin was on the throne. But eight months later, William was dead, leaving a heavily pregnant Sibylla. A new husband was needed.

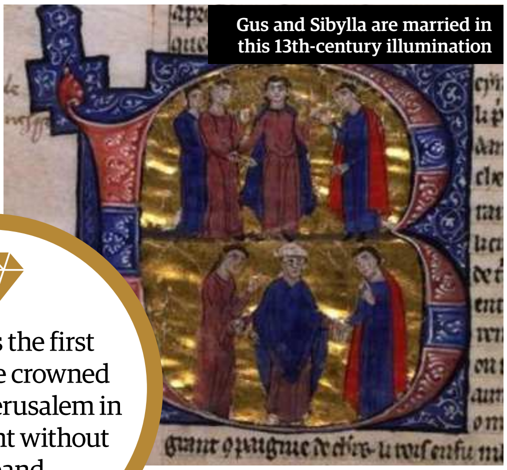
Guy de Lusignan was finally chosen and Sibylla fell in love. The problem? No one else liked Guy, but Sibylla refused to divorce him. Baldwin died in 1185 and Sibylla's supporters wanted her to divorce Guy before she was crowned queen. She agreed, on the condition that she could choose her next husband. At her coronation, she chose Guy.

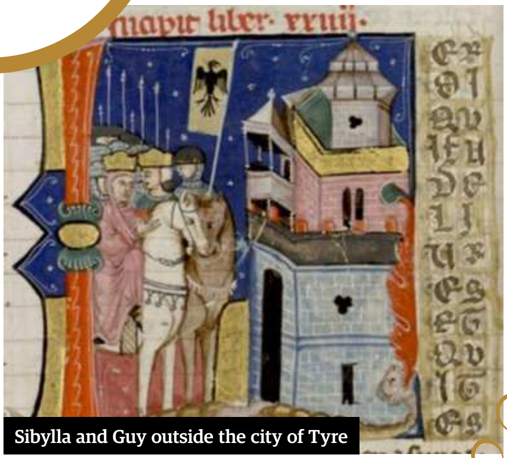
Unsurprisingly, Guy's popularity didn't increase - far from it. He lost 17,000 soldiers in his first year wearing the crown as well as his kingdom. Guy was taken prisoner by Saladin, leaving Sibylla defending Jerusalem on her own. Knowing that her soldiers were depleted, Sibylla's move was a strange one: she begged Saladin to imprison her with her husband. It was there she would die, by her husband's side, devoted to the man her kingdom hated until the bitter end. ◆

Sibylla was the first woman to be crowned as queen of Jerusalem in her own right without a husband

"Ten-year-old Sibylla needed a husband"


The coronation of Guy as king of Jerusalem - the kingdom he would lose just one year later


Gus and Sibylla are married in this 13th-century illumination


Sibylla and Guy outside the city of Tyre

© Alamy, Getty

VILIFIED QUEENS

Some queens are celebrated, while others are vilified throughout the centuries. Yet the line between the two can be perilously thin

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

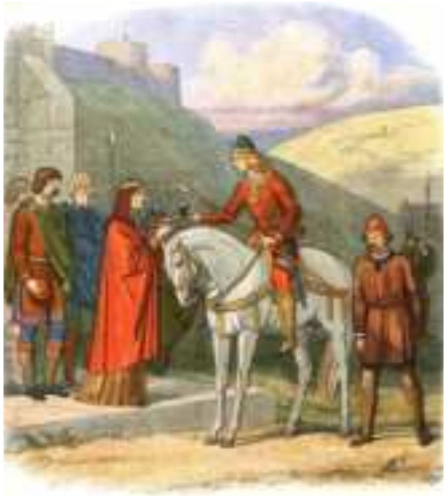
When it comes to queens, some are regarded as legends. Canonised, celebrated and beloved, their legacies live on long after their deaths. Yet not all queens are afforded this kind of afterlife. Some are forgotten, some are maligned and others merely provoke a collective shrug. For a select few though, their vilification didn't wait for their deaths. Instead, they were lambasted in life for everything from marrying the wrong man to attempting the odd ill-fated coup. Not every queen can be beloved, and these ten women knew exactly what it was like to draw the short straw.

> *"Some queens are forgotten, some are maligned and others merely provoke a collective shrug"*

QUEEN ELFRIDA OF THE ENGLISH

A most ambitious mother

ENGLAND, C.964-975



As the wife of King Edgar the Peaceful, Queen Elfrida of the English was the first crowned queen of England. Elfrida became stepmother to her husband's two children, and mother to two sons of her own. When Edgar died in 975, his eldest child, Edward, claimed the throne in direct opposition to Elfrida, who wanted to see her own son, Ethelred, succeed his father.

Three years after he became king, 15-year-old Edward visited his stepmother and stepbrother at Corfe Castle and there, so legend has it, he was murdered by attendants of the Queen. As Edward the Martyr went to his grave, young Ethelred the Unready became king, with Elfrida as his powerful regent. Queen Elfrida was memorialised as a murderess, albeit one who saw out her days peacefully in a nunnery.

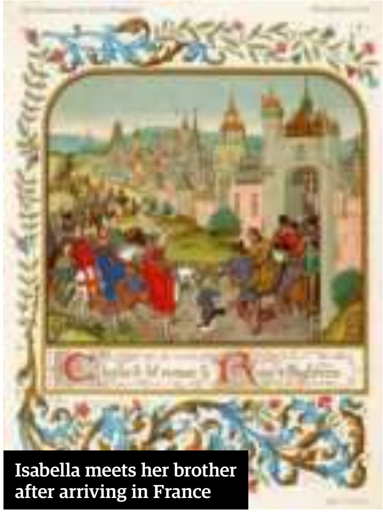
ISABELLA OF FRANCE, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

Don't cross this unforgiving queen

ENGLAND, 1308-1327

Isabella of France became queen of England as the wife of Edward II, but when he made Hugh Despenser the Younger his favourite, she couldn't tolerate the influence of this particular opponent. Travelling to France, she plotted with her lover, Roger Mortimer, to depose her husband and install her son, Edward III on the throne, so she could act as his regent. At first, everything went according to plan, with Despenser's execution and the King's imprisonment, but when Edward II died while in captivity, every finger pointed at Isabella.

Though Isabella and Mortimer ruled for four years, their reign ended when her son, Edward III, mounted a coup against them. After a short spell in prison, the so-called She-Wolf of France was released to a life of luxury, though she kept well away from politics.



Isabella meets her brother after arriving in France

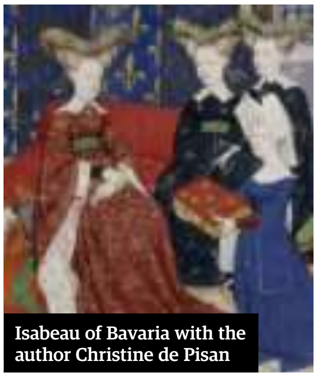
ISABEAU OF BAVARIA, QUEEN OF FRANCE

A slandered woman… maybe

FRANCE, 1385-1422

When her husband, King Charles VI of France, fell victim to mental illness, Isabeau of Bavaria ruled as his regent until their son, Charles VII, reached the age of majority. Sensing an ideal opportunity to seize power, opposing factions battled it out until the Armagnac-Burgundian Civil War erupted in 1407, and Isabeau switched allegiances, seemingly depending on which way she believed the wind was blowing.

Regarded for centuries as being weak, disloyal and keen only on spending money, acquiring luxuries and bedding a whole host of favourites, modern historians have reappraised Isabeau. Today she is seen as a woman who made the best of a bad hand, and one whose reputation has been destroyed by the slanderous and false rumours that still stick to her innocent name to this day.



Isabeau of Bavaria with the author Christine de Pisan

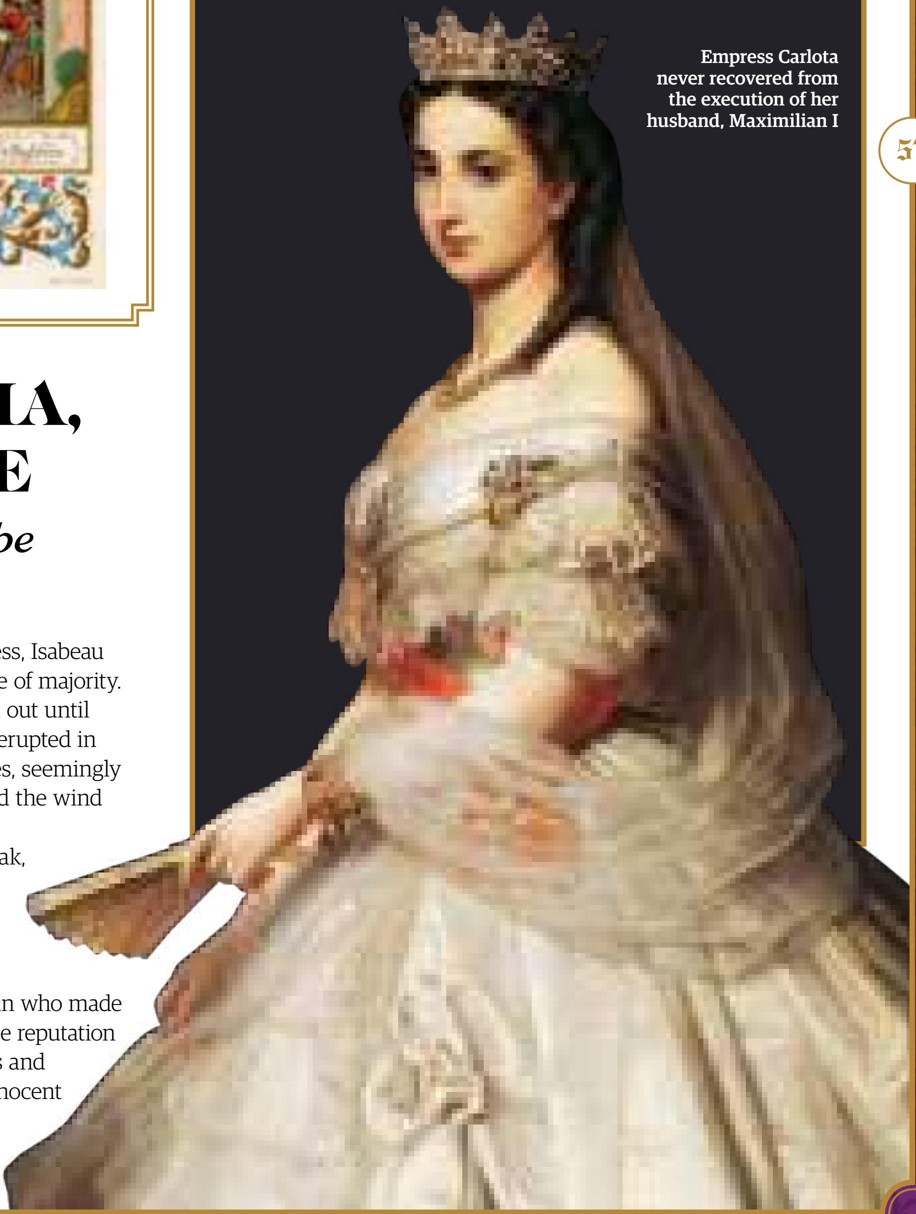
EMPRESS CARLOTA OF MEXICO

An ailing empress

MEXICO, 1864-1867

When Empress Carlota of Mexico learned of plans to withdraw French forces from Mexico and leave her and her husband, Maximilian I, to fend for themselves in the hostile country where Napoleon III had placed them, the empress panicked. She travelled to Rome to make a personal plea for assistance, but found it rejected.

Empress Carlota's nerves collapsed and she was confined in Italy, after her husband was deposed and executed in Mexico. The troubled empress never returned to Mexico but was instead moved to Belgium, where she remained for the next 60 years in a state of perilous mental health. She alternated between silence and angry debates with invisible politicians, devoted only to the memory of the husband she had lost while on her ill-fated mission to Europe.



Empress Carlota never recovered from the execution of her husband, Maximilian I

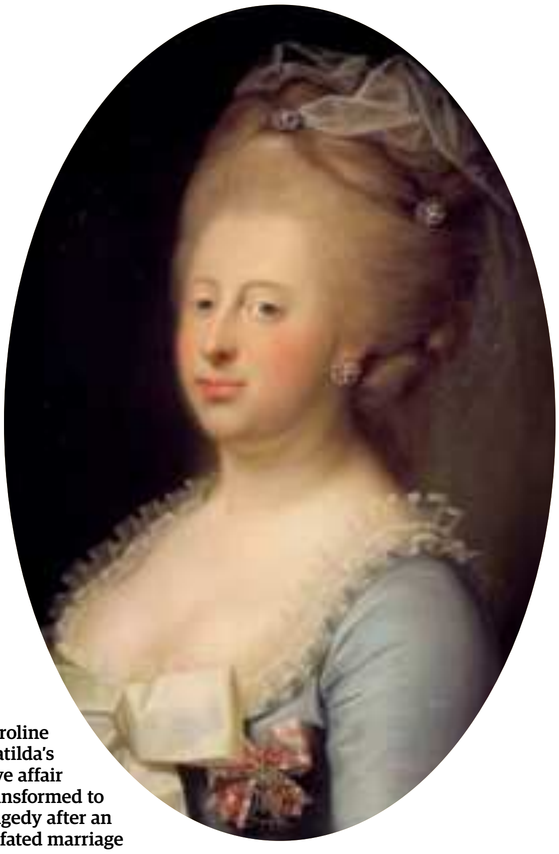
QUEEN CAROLINE MATILDA OF DENMARK

A love affair can prove costly

DENMARK AND NORWAY, 1766-1772

Caroline Matilda of Denmark was the sister of George III. At just 15, the inexperienced and sheltered young woman was married off to her first cousin, Christian VI of Denmark. As Christian's mental health declined and Caroline Matilda grew ever more miserable with her brothel-loving husband, she embarked on an affair with his doctor, Johann Friedrich Struensee.

The Queen and the doctor began to exercise power in the face of Christian's illness, and Caroline Matilda's daughter was widely believed to be Struensee's child. The couple's zeal for reform upset the ruling elite in Denmark, who teamed up with the ailing King's stepmother to mount a coup. With Christian restored to the throne, Struensee was executed and Caroline Matilda confined. George III ignored her pleas to come home and left her to languish until her death at just 23 years of age.

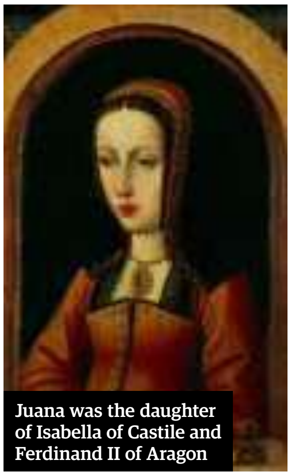


Caroline Matilda's love affair transformed to tragedy after an ill-fated marriage

QUEEN JUANA (JOANNA) OF CASTILE

The prisoner queen

CASTILE, 1504-1555
ARAGON, 1516-1555



Juana was the daughter of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon

In 1504, 25-year-old Juana became the queen of Castile. The early period of her reign was riven by public disorder as poverty, famine and plague ravished the kingdom until her father, King Ferdinand II of Aragon, proclaimed himself both governor and administrator of his daughter's lands. Juana resisted her father's efforts and refused to cooperate with his wishes, yet she proved powerless to stop him.

Two years after he attained power, Ferdinand had his daughter confined in her palace, claiming that she was insane and had refused to surrender her late husband's remains for burial. When Juana's son was appointed her co-monarch, he kept his mother confined until her death at the age of 75. Today, historians dispute the claims that led to her nickname of "Juana the Mad" and debate goes on as to the truth.

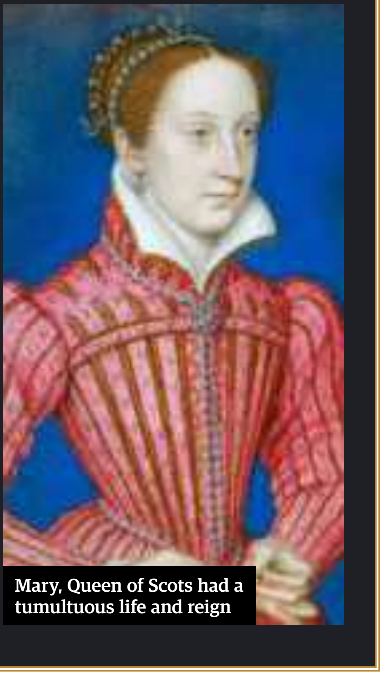
MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

Be careful who you trust

SCOTLAND, 1542-1567
FRANCE, 1559-1560

As the daughter of James V of Scotland, Mary succeeded to the throne at just six days old. When she became old enough to rule, she inherited a kingdom split by politics and religion in which her critics loudly asked whether this was a queen that Scotland even wanted - especially as Mary was a Catholic and Scotland had become a Protestant country. When she married her third husband, the 4th Earl of Bothwell, who was suspected of murdering Mary's second husband just four months earlier, popular opinion turned against the couple.

Forced to abdicate, Mary fled for the kingdom of Queen Elizabeth I, the cousin who fancied Mary's lands as her own. Instead of offering protection, Elizabeth had Mary locked away for nearly 20 years, a confinement that eventually ended in Mary's execution after she was suspected of plotting against the Virgin Queen.



Mary, Queen of Scots had a tumultuous life and reign

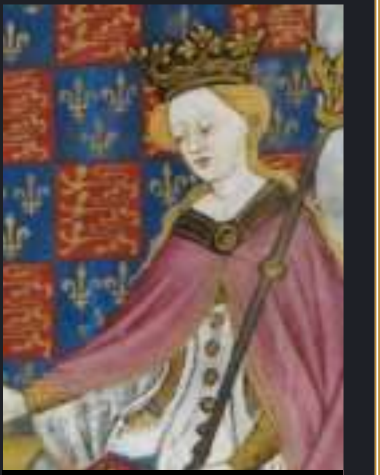
MARGARET OF ANJOU, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

An army-leading queen

ENGLAND, 1445-1461, 1470-1471

Margaret of Anjou found herself thrust into the spotlight when her husband, Henry VI, was laid low by mental illness. In 1455 she fatefully called for a Great Council and excluded Richard of York, 3rd Duke of York, and his Yorkist faction from attending. This perceived slight was the first blow in what became the Wars of the Roses, a three-decade battle for the throne of England that left thousands dead.

As the conflict raged, Margaret led her own army at the Battle of Tewkesbury, where her son was killed, and she met her final defeat. She saw out the last impoverished years of her life in France. In one final indignity, her remains were taken from their resting place during the French Revolution and lost to history.

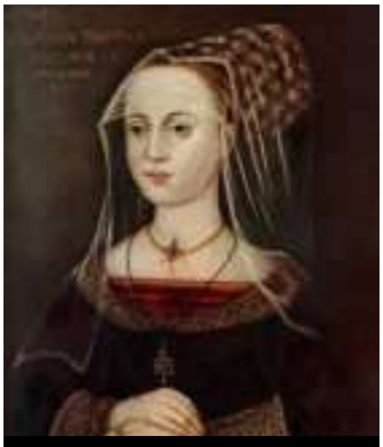


Margaret of Anjou was one of the main figures of the Wars of the Roses

ELIZABETH WOODVILLE, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

Rumours of witchcraft can be damaging

ENGLAND, 1464-1470, 1471-1483



Elizabeth is one of the most controversial queen consorts in English history

When her husband, Edward IV, died suddenly, Elizabeth Woodville's son, Edward V, became king with his uncle as lord protector. Fearful of the power wielded by the Woodvilles, her enemies removed her son from the throne and installed King Richard III in his place.

Within months, Elizabeth surrendered her sons, Edward V and the Duke of York, to the new king. The little boys disappeared forever and their fates remain unknown to this day, known to all as the tragic Princes in the Tower. When Richard seized the crown, he claimed that Elizabeth won the heart of his brother, Edward IV, through witchcraft, a charge that had also been aimed at Elizabeth's mother. Whispers of black magic followed the dowager queen to the end of her days.

QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE

An infamous, executed queen

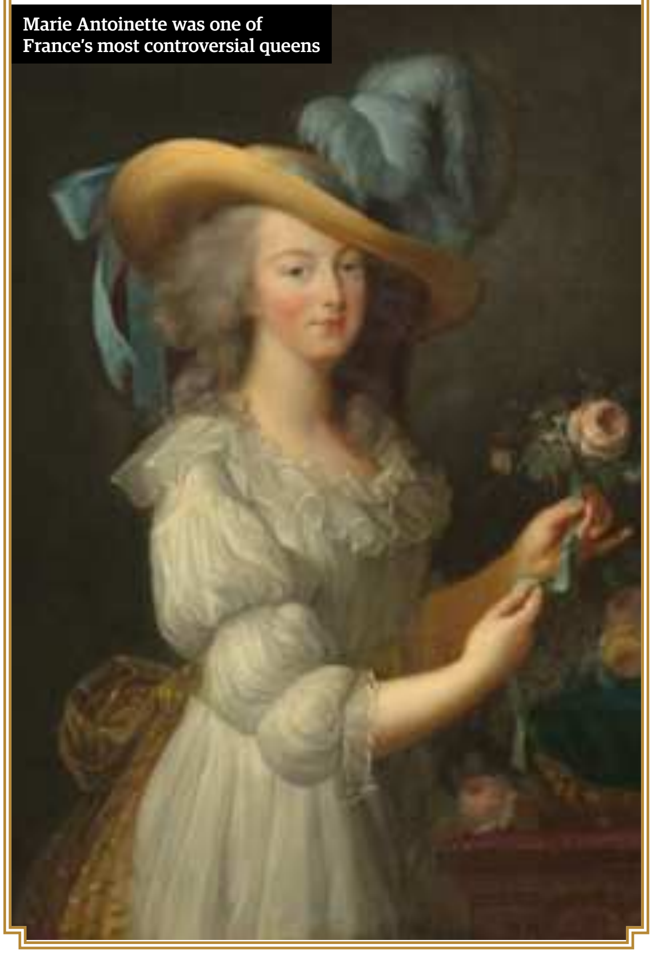
FRANCE, 1774-1792

Queen Marie Antoinette is one of the most divisive figures in history. To some, she is a martyr, murdered by a bloodthirsty mob, whilst to others, she is the symbol of aristocratic ego run amok, wrongly rumoured to have told the starving people of France, "let them eat cake". This maligned woman first arrived in France as an awkward, gawky teenager, and grew into the epitome of royal glamour and largesse.

When revolution swept her marital kingdom, Marie Antoinette and her timid, indecisive husband, Louis XVI, found themselves imprisoned along with other members of the royal family. Dethroned and reduced to the meanest circumstances, Marie Antoinette nevertheless set about devoting herself to trying to protect her family, even as she faced a terrifying fate herself.

The King and Queen were executed in 1793, but their influence and unhappy ending has echoed through more than two centuries.

Marie Antoinette was one of France's most controversial queens



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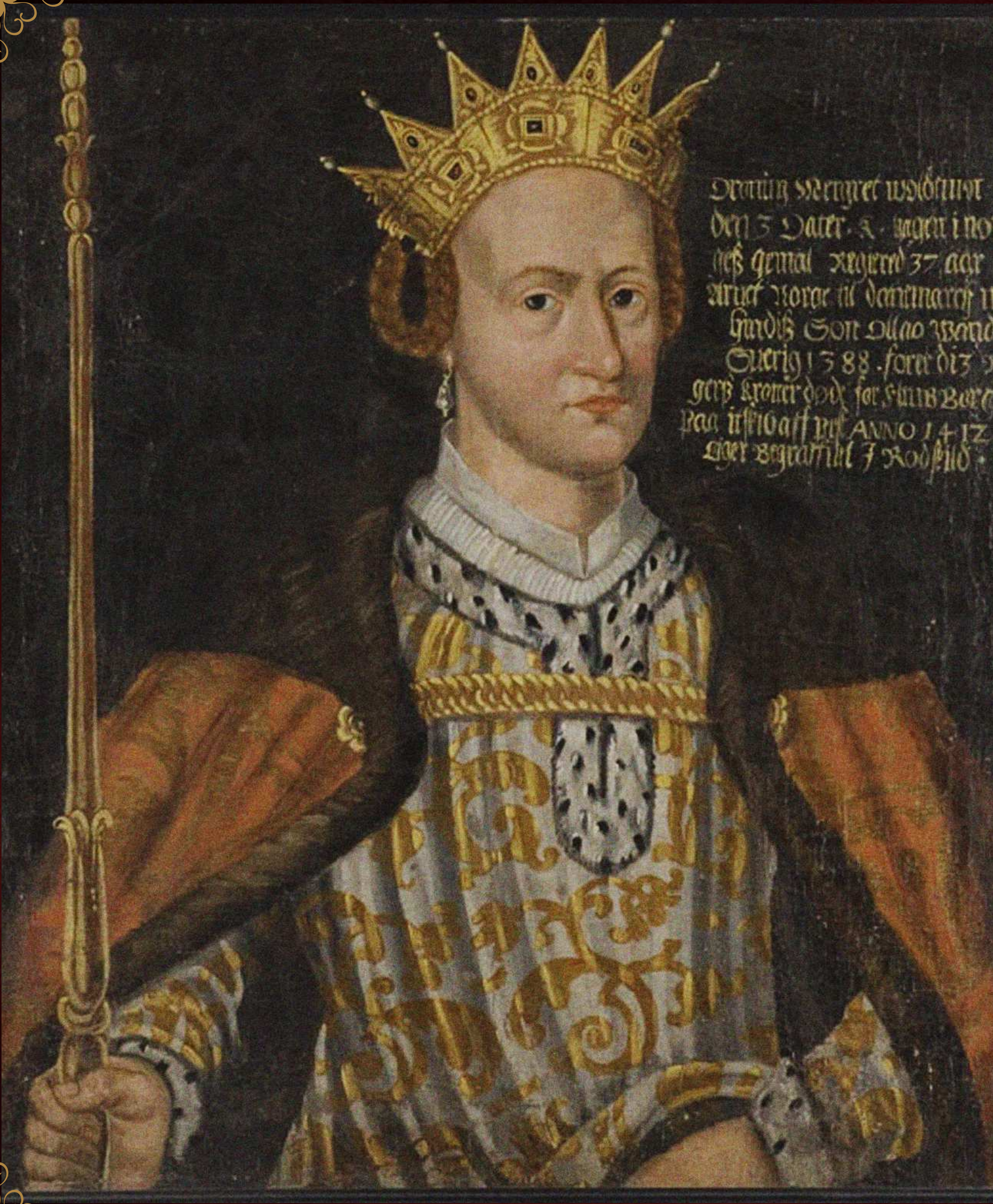
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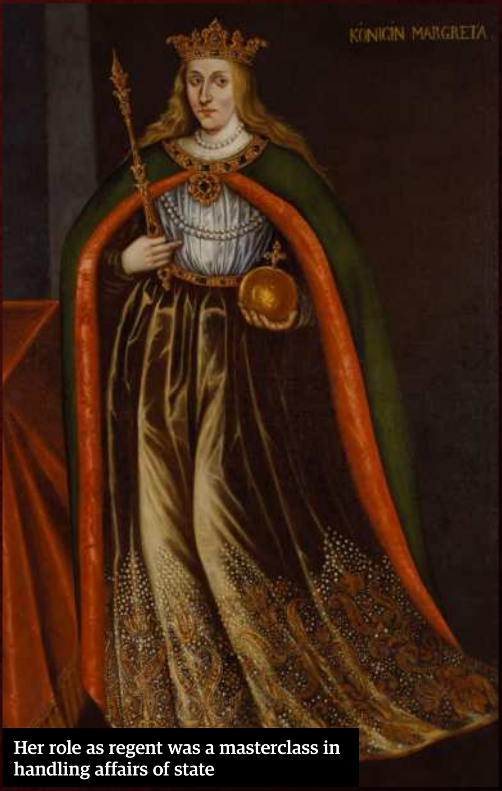
MARGARET I, QUEEN OF DENMARK

Known as the Semiramis of the North after the legendary ancient queen, Margaret I stamped her mark on Scandinavia

At the tender age of seven, Margaret I, daughter of King Valdemar IV of Denmark, was married to Haakon, son of King Magnus Eriksson of Sweden and Norway. The wedding was intended to shore up allegiances in Scandinavia and see off threats from ambitious rulers who sought to add to their own territories. Unfortunately those threats reappeared with the death of Valdemar, though Margaret managed to secure the succession of her five-year-old son, Olaf. Due to Olaf's age, Margaret stepped in and ruled as his regent, a role that she also took on for Norway when her husband died just five years later. After two further years had passed, Margaret responded to a call for intervention from Swedish nobles who were desperate to be rid of their king. Her invading army seized the country and Margaret swiftly added its throne to those held by little Olaf; once again, she would rule as regent. When Margaret published the Treaty of Kalmar, the union of Norway, Denmark and Sweden became official.

Margaret I was described as being beautiful, with an intense gaze

Known as the 'Lady King' by her subjects, Margaret proved to be a more than capable ruler, and one whose eye for the long game proved enormously valuable in matters of state. The Danish-Norwegian union that Margaret's regencies began would last into the 19th century, a testament to the staying power of her vision. Central to that vision was the allowance that each of the three kingdoms would be governed according to its own customs, laws and traditions. None of the nations ruled by her would be forced to accept the laws of another and national identity would be preserved at all times.



Her role as regent was a masterclass in handling affairs of state

Though the three thrones were inherited by Margaret's grandnephew, Eric of Pomerania, following the early death of her son, she continued to rule in all but name. Margaret's wise council and intelligent strategising during her regency and the years afterwards proved invaluable for the union of Sweden, Denmark and Norway, strengthening what had been three vulnerable states into a force to be reckoned with. She always ruled with wisdom and shrewd intelligence and although she is little remembered, her achievements stand out in the history of Scandinavia, and her influence can still be seen today. ◆

> *"None of the nations ruled by her would be forced to accept the laws of another"*

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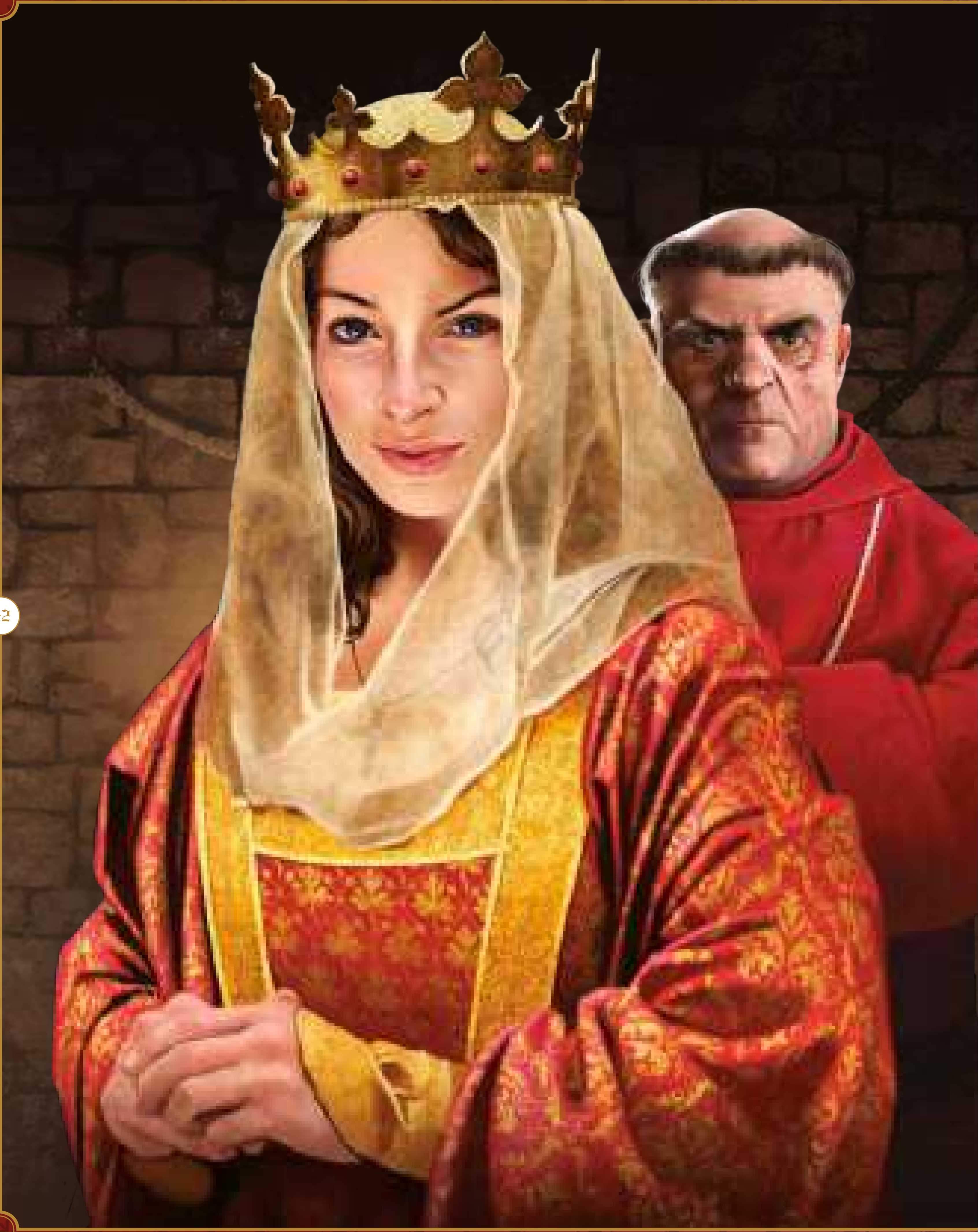


1479 – 1504

ISABELLA OF CASTILE

After succession squabbles marred her path to the throne, Isabella secured her legacy by setting sights on purifying her Catholic Spain

Isabella had been born for this moment. If the 23-year-old princess felt anything other than serenity and conviction, it did not show on her face, her expression betraying nothing as she processed into the church of San Miguel, Segovia, Spain. At last the day had come, and she was to take her place as the queen of Castile and Leon, the largest of the Iberian Peninsula's fragmented kingdoms.

The whole city had come to witness her triumph. Only hours before, they had buried the old king and now, his successor, bestride a white horse and adorned with jewels and riches to display her power, came to deliver them from the chaos and disorder that had plagued the people for so long.

Surrounded by her new subjects, Isabella proclaimed her intentions towards the beleaguered kingdom with grace and authority. She promised peace and stability, and, above all, she would uphold the church that was the cornerstone of her world. Religious unity and peace would reign once again in the Iberian Peninsula. God had decreed it through her, and she would not fail in her duty.

Isabella, to be known in her own time and in centuries to come as one of the greatest rulers Spain had ever seen, was born to John II of Castile and Isabella of Portugal on 22 April 1451. Or so the sources imply, for, at the time, she was considered so inconsequential that the date of her birth and baptism were not even recorded.

She was born into a Spain that was not yet united: Castile and the rest of the Iberian Peninsula was a hotbed of political, religious and social unrest, and the princess – who stood third in line to the throne after the birth of her younger brother, Alfonso – did not have a secure childhood. When her father died in 1454, her elder stepbrother became king as Henry IV. Living away from court but under the constant eye of her older brother's men, Isabella, her grief-stricken mother and younger brother were kept out of the public eye, ostensibly for their own good but in reality to keep them away from the intrigue that surrounded the court and the thorny issue of the succession.

In greatly reduced living conditions, it was here that Isabella's life-long piety was first carefully cultivated at the hands of her mother and friends, the religious conviction that would see her through many a hardship taking root in fertile soil. It was also during these years of hardship that Isabella's already apparent self-control and iron will were carefully honed, standing her in good stead for what was to follow.

Castile under Henry's rule was dangerously unstable. Weak, inept and in thrall to his favourites, the king was dethroned in effigy by his nobles in 1465 and Isabella's younger brother declared king. Civil war broke out, and as the kingdom descended into terror and brutality, Isabella switched allegiance, proclaiming her support for her younger brother. Alfonso was expected to return Castile to its former glory, but hopes were dashed when the young pretender died suddenly in 1468. Amid the official story of plague, rumours of poisoning abounded, and Isabella, named as Alfonso's successor, became the perfect focus for the hopes of the kingdom.

Over the following years, she steered a careful course; instead of succumbing to pressure to lead the revolt, she remained outwardly agreeable towards her older brother, negotiating expertly to achieve what she wanted. Honing the control and determination that had been instilled in her during her early years, Isabella bided her time, waiting for the moment she would be called to bring her kingdom back to order.

Isabella attracted several suitors over the years, but the one who held her lasting attention was Ferdinand, the second son of John, king of the neighbouring kingdom of Aragon. Similar in age to her, fit, athletic, handsome and witty, the match had first been mooted when Isabella was only six years old. Now, 12 years later, she negotiated her own marriage under the nose of her brother, and in defiance of the king, married Ferdinand in 1469.

With his kingdom in tatters, Henry died in 1474 and Isabella took the throne as queen of Castile and Leon on 11 December 1474. Although heralded by many as the saviour of the kingdom, the early years of her reign were far from smooth, rife with rebellions and plots to overthrow her. Although she had not been trained to rule, and was lacking in Latin and other accomplishments deemed necessary for the task, Isabella did not falter; she had been appointed by God, and by God she would rule. Only she could bring religious unity to the divided kingdom. Her entire life she had been waiting for this moment. She would not fail. ▶

> Although initially approved by the pope, the Inquisition was later condemned by the papacy

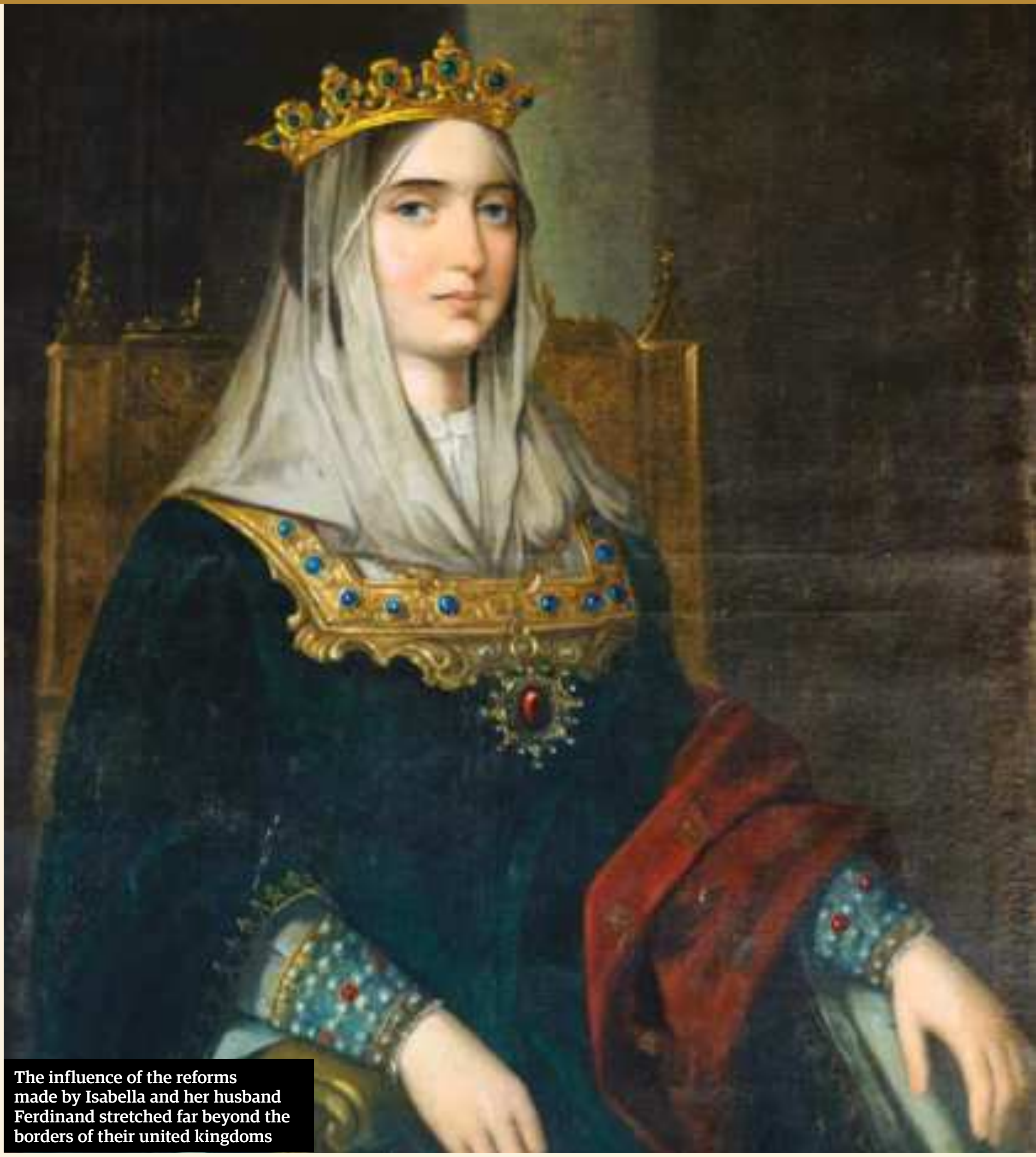
Reforming a kingdom

After inheriting a kingdom in turmoil, Isabella initiated highly effective reform

Law: La Santa Hermandad, or The Holy Brotherhood, was revived, an old system of armed local militias that acted as a citizen police force. Accountable to the queen, they tracked and captured criminals, as well as helping to establish and maintain order. The Hermandad were highly efficient, with a close to 100 per cent success rate. Isabella also personally oversaw the appointment of judges, and the entire judicial system grew more efficient due to regular checks and officials being held to account.

Finance: Currency throughout the kingdom was in a poor state, with coinage debased and inflation driving the population to financial ruin. Isabella reduced the number of royal mints to combat this problem and took control of currency production, restoring the value of Castilian coin. The previous reigns had left the royal coffers devastatingly depleted, especially due to the injudicious selling off of Crown lands. This was halted and reversed under Isabella, with lands either given or sold back to the Crown.

Government: The reform of the royal council was high on Isabella's list of priorities, and she eradicated the dominance of the nobility by restructuring the composition of the council to consist of nine lawyers and only three nobles. She also recognised the importance of personal contact with her subjects, and ensured that there was ample opportunity for people to air their grievances in her presence. The council of state found itself reformed, new councils were established and the entirety of the governmental machine was streamlined to maximise efficiency.



The influence of the reforms made by Isabella and her husband Ferdinand stretched far beyond the borders of their united kingdoms

Jews had lived in Spain for over 1,500 years, and in Isabella's time there was a ratio of about 80,000 Jews to 6 million Christians. The question of the Jewish faith had long been a delicate issue throughout Europe. Expelled from England in 1290 and France just under a century later, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon had not followed suit, although there had been forced conversions to Christianity twice in quite recent history. Those who converted became known as 'conversos'.

There were those, however, who did not think that the conversos were entirely sincere. They had taken advantage of their new position, it was argued, and indeed many reached positions of power and wealth within the kingdom, further fuelling rumours and jealousies. These false converts, guilty of Judaising - practising their old religion while professing the new - were a threat to the security of the realm and the very souls of those who lived there.

Although clever in their deception, there were ways to tell if a convert was still secretly holding to Jewish ways. Food, for one, played a big part in determining if someone's conversion was sincere. Not eating pork, rabbit, and birds that had been strangled was a giveaway, as was frying meat in olive oil instead of lard. Cleansing of meat in general, the cutting off of fat and cooking meat in advance so as not to cook on a Saturday was also used as evidence against supposedly converted 'new' Christians. Avoiding baptising their children and denying that Jesus had been the Messiah were among other ways of identifying a secret Jew.

The matter was further complicated as there were varying degrees of non-adherence. Some conversos were deeply against the tenets of the Catholic Church, maintaining as many elements of their old faith as they could get away with. Others adopted a mixed approach, mingling Jewish practice with Christian in a hybrid religion that differed from family to family.

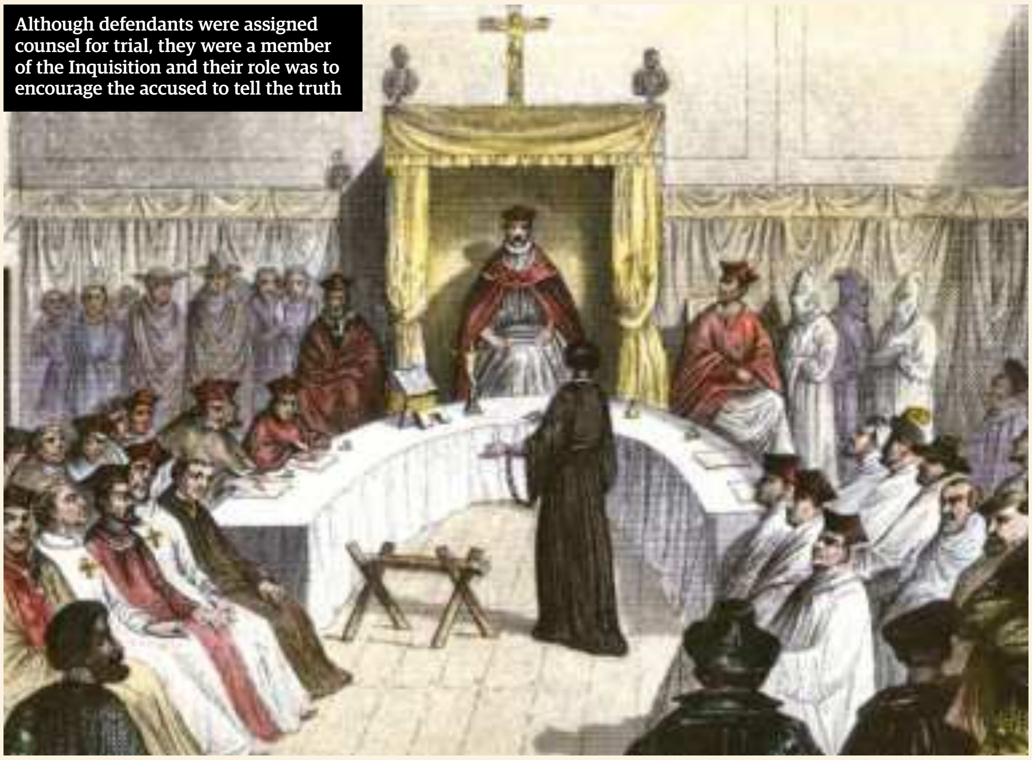
One thing was certain, it would no longer be tolerated. Heresy was not something the new queen could afford to ignore; not only the souls of her people but also her own would be in peril, and must be saved at all costs.

It is often said that a visit to Seville in 1477 first stirred Isabella's interest in adopting an inquisition - or investigation - into the religious state of her kingdom. Receiving first-hand reports of false converts within the city would have alarmed the devout queen greatly. The threat they posed to the religious unity and wellbeing of her kingdom would have been a very real concern.

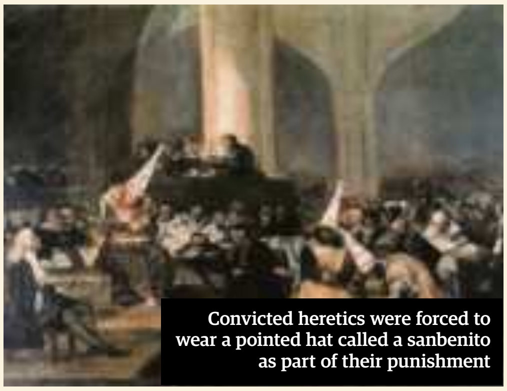
There were those who advocated an aggressive approach from the start, but it seems Isabella was not initially inclined to follow such a course. Despite a Papal Bull granted in 1478 by Pope Sixtus IV giving permission to establish the Inquisition within Castile, Isabella was in no hurry to put it into practice. Ignoring the advocates of a high-handed approach, Isabella instead focused her attention on religious education - or rather the lack of it. Certain that poor training was the reason conversos were failing to follow their new faith, she embarked upon a programme of education to establish the religious conformity essential for the security of her reign.

Two men greatly trusted by Isabella - Cardinal Mendoza and her confessor, the eventual Archbishop of Granada, Hernando de Talavera - were entrusted with this vital task. Arriving in Seville, they set to work, organising priests into enlightening the misguided conversos. They did not make much headway, however, and it soon became clear that they could do little to penetrate the religious ignorance that plagued the town.

For two years attempts were continued, with little success. Despite her own reservations, there were those close to Isabella who continued to



Although defendants were assigned counsel for trial, they were a member of the Inquisition and their role was to encourage the accused to tell the truth



Convicted heretics were forced to wear a pointed hat called a sanbenito as part of their punishment

advocate the introduction of an inquisition. Even her husband Ferdinand, ever the pragmatist, was all for it; if nothing else, it would prove a good way of inflating the royal coffers through the confiscation of converso property. With a heavy heart and steely resolve, Isabella conceded that her attempts to bring religious conformity and peace to her realm had failed. And so, by a royal decree of 27 September 1480, The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition was unleashed upon Castile.

Isabella's initial aim was simple: root out the false converts among the converso population and get rid of the heretics jeopardising her beloved kingdom. Although popularised in Spain, it was not an entirely novel idea, and the new inquisition was modelled closely on the older Medieval Inquisition. Under Isabella and Ferdinand, however, the inquisitorial method was given new life, fuelled by Isabella's conviction that religious unity must be achieved whatever the cost.

Despite the reputation the Spanish Inquisition would later gain, initially it was not entirely unpopular. On the contrary, at a time when the kingdom had been almost torn apart by the instability of civil war, to some it was a relief to see the proof of firm control being established by the new reign of Isabella. This relief, however, proved premature: the people of the kingdom of Castile would live to regret the day the Inquisition was established within their cities.

With their distinctive white robes and black hoods, the Inquisitors began in Seville, a city known for its converso laxity. Their arrival caused mass panic among the converso community, with about 4,000 people fleeing the city. Retribution was swift. The nobility, under the threat of excommunication, informed against those whose whereabouts were known to them, while steps were taken to find those who had fled.

The first public execution took place in Seville on 6 February 1481. During the spectacle of the auto de fe, six people were burned, a terrifying declaration of the Inquisition's power and the intention of the monarchy behind it.

The Inquisition spread steadily through Spain, with tribunals set up in Cordoba, Jaen and the religious capital of Toledo by 1485. A pattern of proceedings was established. Firstly, the people of a town were prepared; the fear of God - and by extension the Inquisition - preached from the pulpit for all to hear. Matters officially began with the arrival of the Inquisitors, when the Edict of Grace - a call to come forward and confess - would be read out, and a span of time given to the people of the town to respond. If they confessed their sins and admitted their Judaism, they could hope for redemption. If not, they should expect the full wrath of the Inquisition to fall upon them.

Once a suspect was in custody, the primary aim was to extract a confession. If they did not speak freely, there were ways of gaining the information required. Torture and the Spanish Inquisition have become virtually synonymous in the popular imagination, and for good reason. A standard 15th-century approach, it was used by the Inquisition in order to gain the all-important admission of guilt. Although technically a suspect could only undergo torture once, there were ways around this restriction; talk of a session being paused or suspended meant that it could be continued the following day without strictly breaking the rules.

Once confession had been obtained, the details of the case were then examined, and a verdict and sentence (if necessary) decided. Acquittal, although rare, could sometimes occur. A suspect could likewise be sentenced to perform penance, or the harsher verdict of reconciliation, which could mean indefinite imprisonment, religious incarceration, flogging, or serving on a galley boat. Those who were reconciled were made to wear a yellow gown called a sanbenito, woollen and knee length, and a tall, conical hat called a coroza to advertise to people that they had sinned. This was not even forgotten on death - the sanbenito would be on display in the local church to the shame of the family left behind.

What made the Inquisition so feared was the fact that it thrived on that most deadly of weapons: anonymous accusations. Not only that, but once a confession was made, a suspect was required to name others who had also lapsed, thus giving the Inquisition a steady stream of victims. Refusing or failing to alert the authorities as to the identity or whereabouts of a heretic could also lead to arrest and execution.

Although permission and blessing were initially granted by the pope, the Inquisition was financed and organised by Isabella and Ferdinand themselves. Whether Isabella personally attended an execution ordered by the Inquisition is unknown, but it is undeniable that she knew, and approved of, the methods used by the Inquisitorial machine. Despite this, many of her closest and most trusted advisers had converted from the Jewish faith, with three secretaries who served the monarchs being from converso families. It was even said that Ferdinand himself had Jewish blood in his veins from converso ancestors.

Despite Isabella's hopes, it became apparent that merely targeting conversos was not enough, and in 1492, all Jews were expelled from Spain. In the following decades, the Inquisition spread throughout Spanish-held territory, including Naples, the Spanish Netherlands and in the Americas. There is no established figure of how many people in total were affected, although it is estimated that 3,000 people went to the flames during Isabella's reign. The Inquisition, to this day, remains "one of the most cruel and enduring religious persecutions known in the history of Western Europe," the name and its deeds inextricably linked to that of Queen Isabella of Castile.

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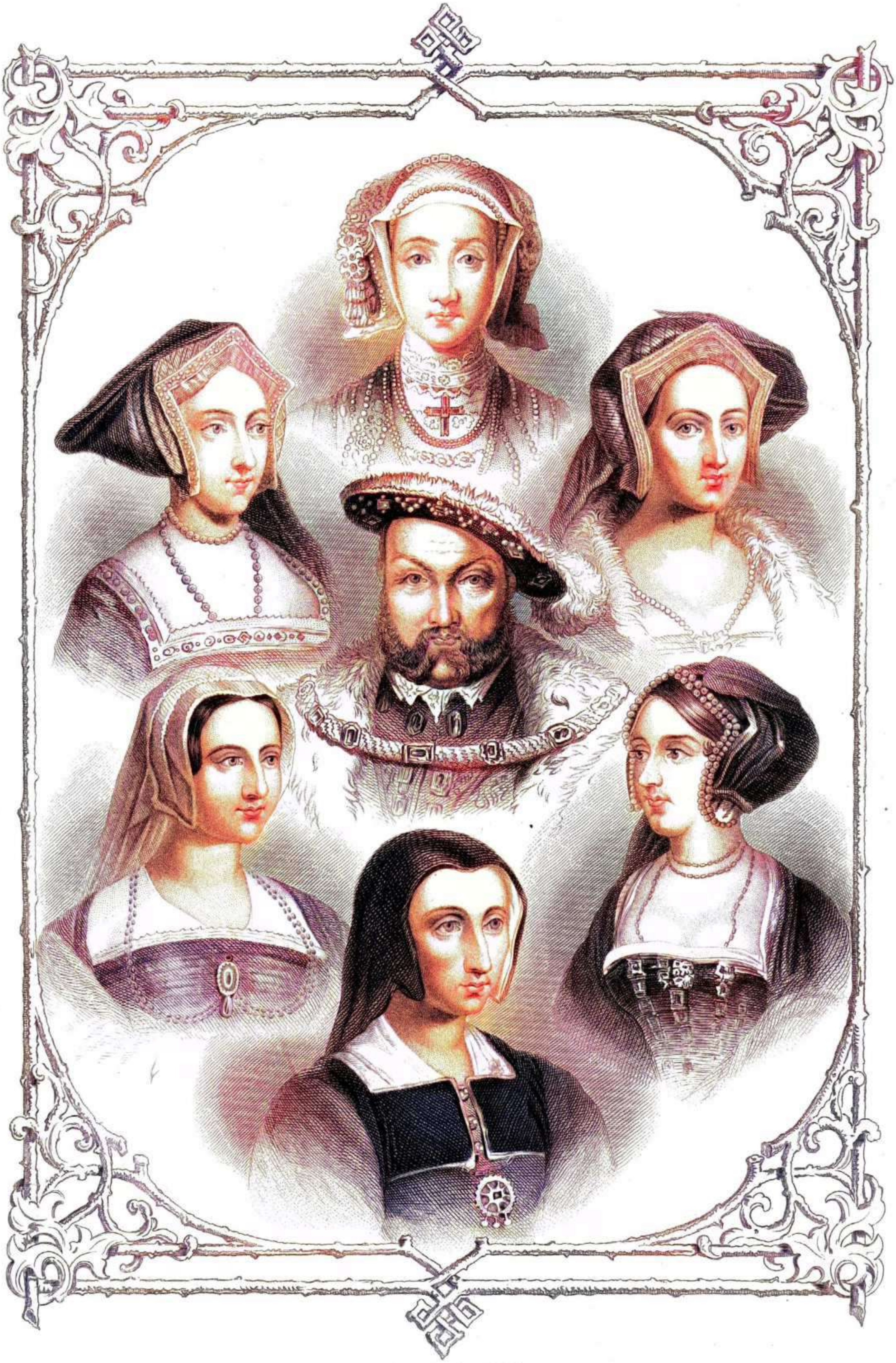


THE TUDOR QUEEN CONSORTS

A look at the reigns of Henry VIII's six wives and what they each prioritised as queens of England

WRITTEN BY EMILY STANIFORTH

Famous for being married to England's notorious love rat of a king, it is hard not to have heard of the six wives of Henry VIII. We know them as a list of names, immortalised in the rhyme: "Divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived." But what else did these women do during their lives, before they left Henry's orbit?

Each of Henry's wives reigned as queen consort of England during their marriages, even if only for a short while. As influential Tudor women, they certainly deserve to be remembered as more than a footnote in the reign of a tyrant. So, who were the six Tudor queen consorts, and what did they achieve?

CATHERINE OF ARAGON

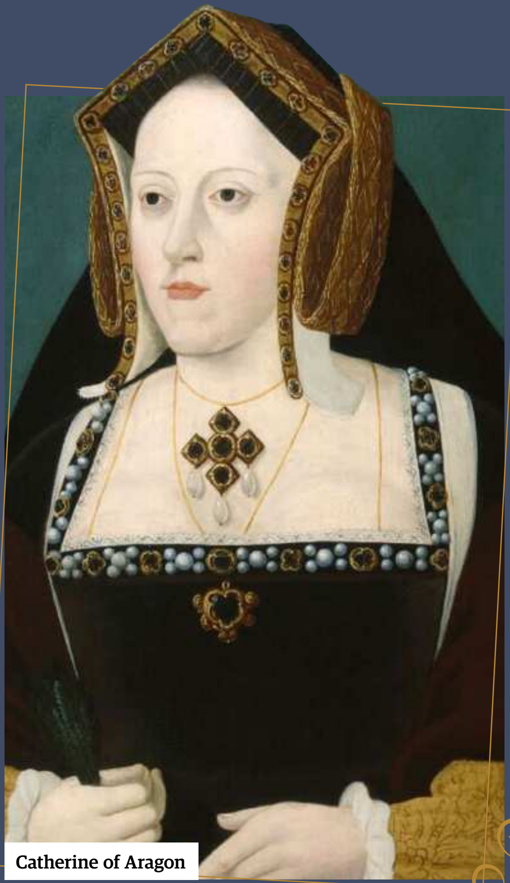
1485-1536

A princess from birth, Catherine of Aragon was born into a life of prominence. Her parents, King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile, ensured she was given a thorough education in subjects ranging from literature to arithmetic during her childhood in Spain. She was also brought up in the Catholic faith, and religion continued to play a huge part in Catherine's life. Having been betrothed to Arthur Tudor, the son of Henry VII and older brother of the future Henry VIII, from when she was young, Catherine was sent to England as a teenager to embark on her new life as the future queen of England.

Arthur's sudden death, after only a few months of marriage, did not put a stop to Catherine's journey to becoming the English queen. She subsequently married Arthur's brother Henry, just after he ascended to the throne, and was crowned queen in a joint coronation ceremony with her new husband the day after their wedding.

As queen, Catherine actively participated in England's affairs. She was valued by her husband, who entrusted her with acting as regent while he was off fighting battles abroad. One of the most famous and impressive episodes of Catherine's regency came in September 1513, when James IV led his Scottish forces over the border and into England. As acting captain general of the English army, Catherine mobilised the English troops and achieved victory at the Battle of Flodden in Northumberland. King James was slain on the battlefield and Catherine had kept England's borders safe. As a token of her success, Catherine sent James's bloodied coat to France where Henry was fighting.

Away from the battlefield, Catherine also played a role in carving out the intellectual landscape of Tudor England, acting as a patron for Renaissance humanists like Desiderius Erasmus. Having benefited from a wide-ranging and extensive education herself, it is not surprising that Catherine's educational interests would continue into her later life. In arranging for the education of her only child, Princess Mary (later Mary I), she hired the humanist scholar Juan Luis Vives, who wrote the influential *The Education of a Christian Woman*, which he dedicated to Catherine.



Catherine of Aragon

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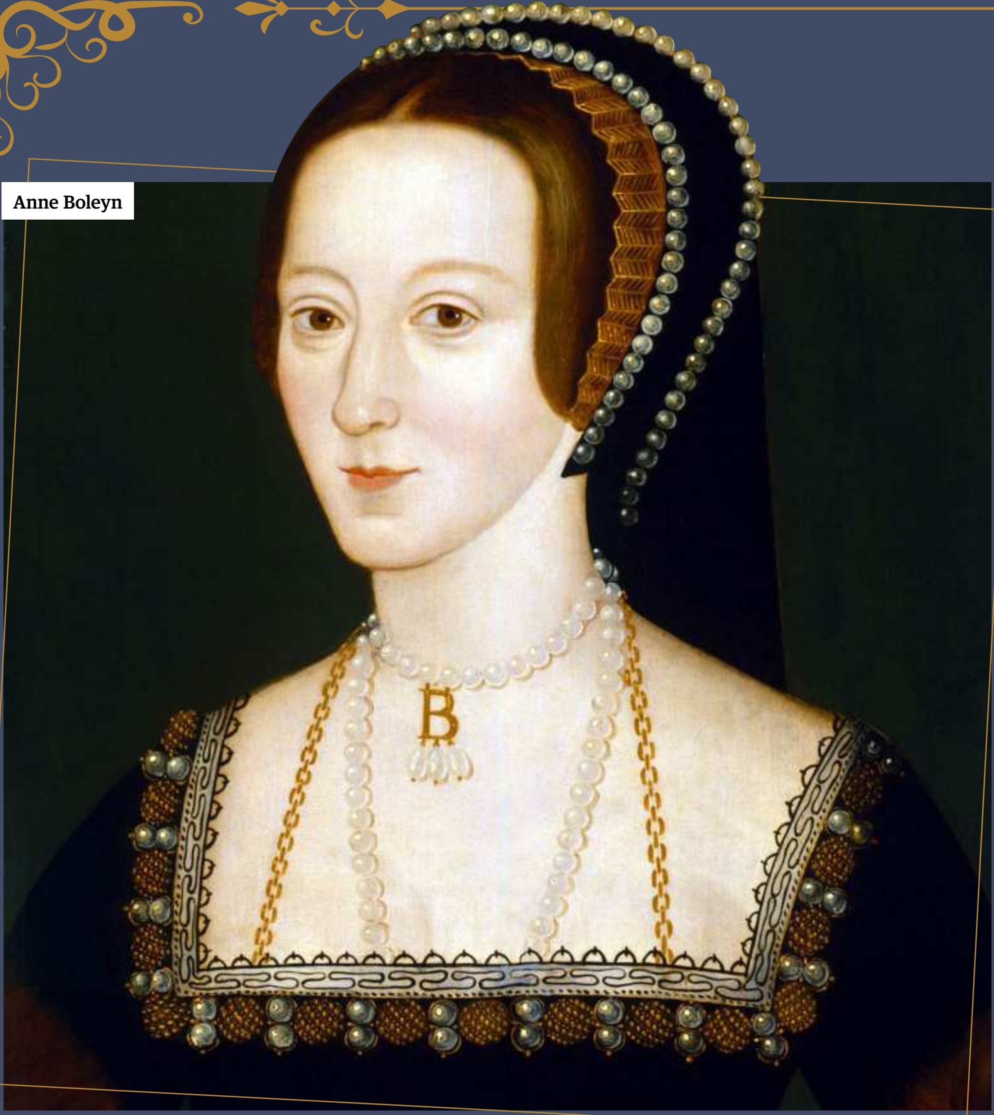

Anne Boleyn

ANNE BOLEYN

c.1501-1536

Of all Henry's wives, Anne Boleyn is probably the most famous. Remembered by history as the woman who seduced King Henry into leaving his long-suffering first wife of 23 years and inspiring the break with Rome, Anne's legacy is one of scandal and impropriety. She was the first of Henry's wives to be executed after being charged with adultery. However, Anne's legacy does not do her achievements justice.

Anne Boleyn was a smart and capable woman in her own right before she ever met Henry. Educated alongside her brother and sister, Anne's teaching was not confined to the domestic and courtly arts. She spent several years of her later childhood at the courts of Queen Margaret of Austria in the Low Countries (the Netherlands) and subsequently the French Queen Claude. Here, Anne thrived in an environment where she had access to some of the greatest European minds and studied literature, art and music.

Anne left the French court in 1522, and travelled back to England where she caught the eye of the King, who at this point was becoming desperate for a son and heir. Anne's European education and upbringing attracted many admirers at the English court, but it was Henry who eventually managed to win her hand. After annulling his marriage to Catherine and breaking from the Catholic Church when the Pope refused to grant him a divorce, Anne was made queen in 1533 shortly after their marriage.

Despite having been raised in the Catholic faith, Anne's exposure to the ideas of Protestant reformers in Europe led her to advocate for religious reform in the Church of England, which had been established in order for Henry to be able to divorce Catherine and marry Anne. Though little is actually known of her activities, it is believed that she championed Lutheran reform, and privately read Lutheran materials. She is also believed to have been involved with drafting poverty reforms, which would eventually be used as the basis for Thomas Cromwell's Poor Law bill. Anne's original reforms were also featured in the Poor Law, which would later be drawn up by her daughter, Elizabeth I.

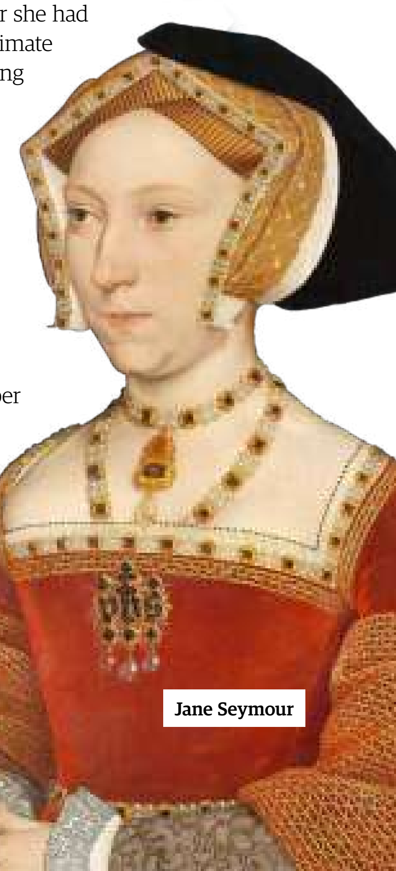
JANE SEYMOUR

c.1508-1537

Henry married Jane Seymour just 11 days after the execution of Anne Boleyn. Jane had held a position as a lady-in-waiting to Anne, which is where she caught the attention of Henry's wandering eye. She had also served as a lady-in-waiting for Catherine of Aragon. Unlike the first two of Henry's wives, Jane had a modest upbringing with very little intellectual education. Instead, she had been taught to excel in domestic tasks – like the majority of women during the Tudor period. Historians are often confused as to the nature of Jane's appeal to a king who had been married to two extremely headstrong wives previously. Yet, it was Jane who is believed to have been the great love of Henry's life, and the only wife who gave him the son and heir he longed for. Whether Henry's affection for his wife would have waned with time is impossible to tell, as Jane died in childbirth only a year into their marriage.

During her short time as queen, Jane fought hard for the things that mattered most to her. Her involvement in politics and religion was seen in the appeals she purportedly made to Henry to obtain pardons for some of the rebels captured during the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. She is also said to have appealed to her husband to stop the dissolution of at least one convent. However, she was unsuccessful and does not appear to have inserted herself into political matters again.

As stepmother to Henry's first daughter, Mary, Jane made an effort to bring Mary back into the royal family after she had been declared illegitimate by her father following her parents' divorce. Thanks in part to Jane's sympathy towards the young princess, Mary was reunited with her father and was even made godmother to Henry and Jane's son, Edward, at his christening in October 1537. Jane died shortly after the christening and was mourned by both Henry and Mary.


Jane Seymour

ANNE OF CLEVES

1515-1557

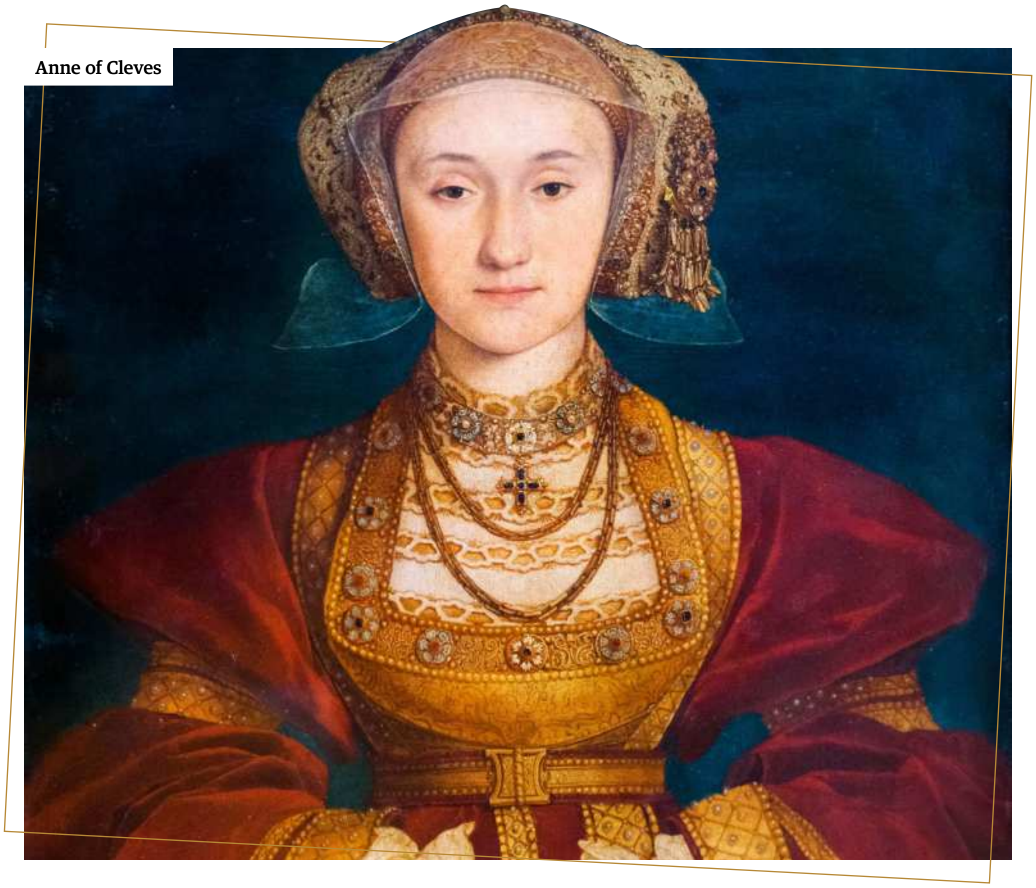
The story of Anne of Cleves and her first unfortunate encounter with Henry VIII set the scene for their brief and unsuccessful marriage. Henry, who had only ever seen a painting of Anne by Hans Holbein, decided to meet her in disguise when she arrived in England from the Holy Roman Empire (Germany). Anne, who did not recognise the King in disguise, was disgusted by the strange man who tried to kiss her and pushed him away. Henry was mortified by the event, and the relationship between the two only worsened from that point.

Henry was disappointed by Anne's appearance, with her later becoming unkindly nicknamed in England as the "Flanders Mare". After their wedding in January 1540, Henry claimed that they had not been able to consummate the marriage. An annulment was sought by Henry, to which Anne agreed. By July of that year they were no longer husband and wife.

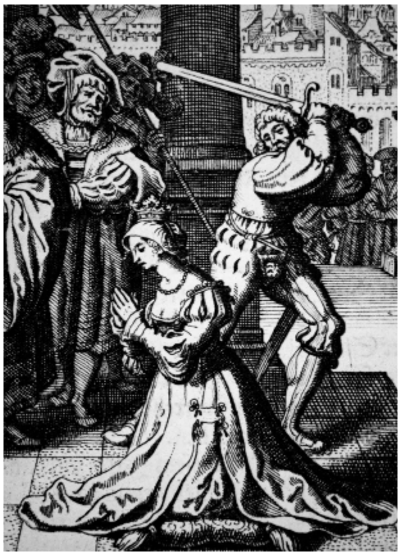
Despite her short time as Henry's wife and consort (she was never even formally crowned), Anne was financially rewarded for her troubles. On the condition that she did not return to the Holy Roman Empire and stayed in England, she was provided with an income and was given Richmond Palace and Hever Castle, among other properties. Anne lived a life of luxury, enjoying hobbies and the privileges that came from being held up as one of the most important ladies in England after the King's wife and daughters. She was a truly independent woman, which was almost unheard of at the time.

She never married again but surprisingly formed a close friendship with Henry that endured until his death. They fondly referred to each other as "brother" and "sister", and Anne continued to play a role in the lives of all three of her former stepchildren. She frequently visited the children, and mentioned both Mary and Elizabeth in her will. Her last appearance in public was at the coronation of Mary I in 1553, where she rode alongside Elizabeth, highlighting the position in which she was still held by the Tudors, despite having been married to the King for only six months over ten years before. Anne was the last of Henry's wives to die, passing away in 1557.

> *"Anne was a truly independent woman, which was almost unheard of at the time"*



Anne of Cleves



"Off with her head!"

WHY DID HENRY VIII EXECUTE TWO OF HIS WIVES?

When you look at it numerically, a third of Henry VIII's wives were executed. Both Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, who were also first cousins, were executed at the Tower of London after Henry decided to be rid of them.

Anne's execution came after a trial that saw her accused of adultery and incest (with her brother, George Boleyn, who was also executed as a result of Anne's downfall). However, Anne never admitted to any such affairs and maintained her innocence until her death. The allegations against Anne were part of a plot orchestrated by Henry's right-hand man, Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell had assisted Henry in his mission to obtain a divorce and marry Anne, but had come to dislike the Queen. Anne is said to have disapproved of Cromwell using wealth accumulated from the dissolution of the monasteries to further the ambitions of the monarchy. When Henry began to grow tired of Anne and the fact that she had not yet given birth to a son, Cromwell once again acted in Henry's interests, and in the process succeeded in removing his own opponent. Anne's execution in 1536 allowed Henry to remarry, and paved the way for Cromwell to maintain his position of power.

In terms of Catherine Howard's downfall, it is possible that she had engaged in an affair with Thomas Culpeper, a man who she had previously considered marrying, during her marriage to the King. Also, as a teenager Catherine had been in a relationship with Francis Dereham, with whom she may have exchanged vows or have at least agreed to marry. When information came to light about Catherine's past, which suggested she had not been a virgin when she married the King, her title as queen consort was removed and she was imprisoned. Dereham and Culpeper were both executed, followed shortly by Catherine in February 1542.

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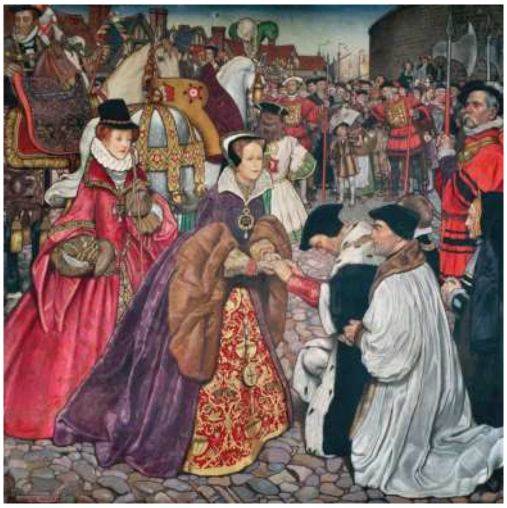


THE LATER TUDOR QUEENS

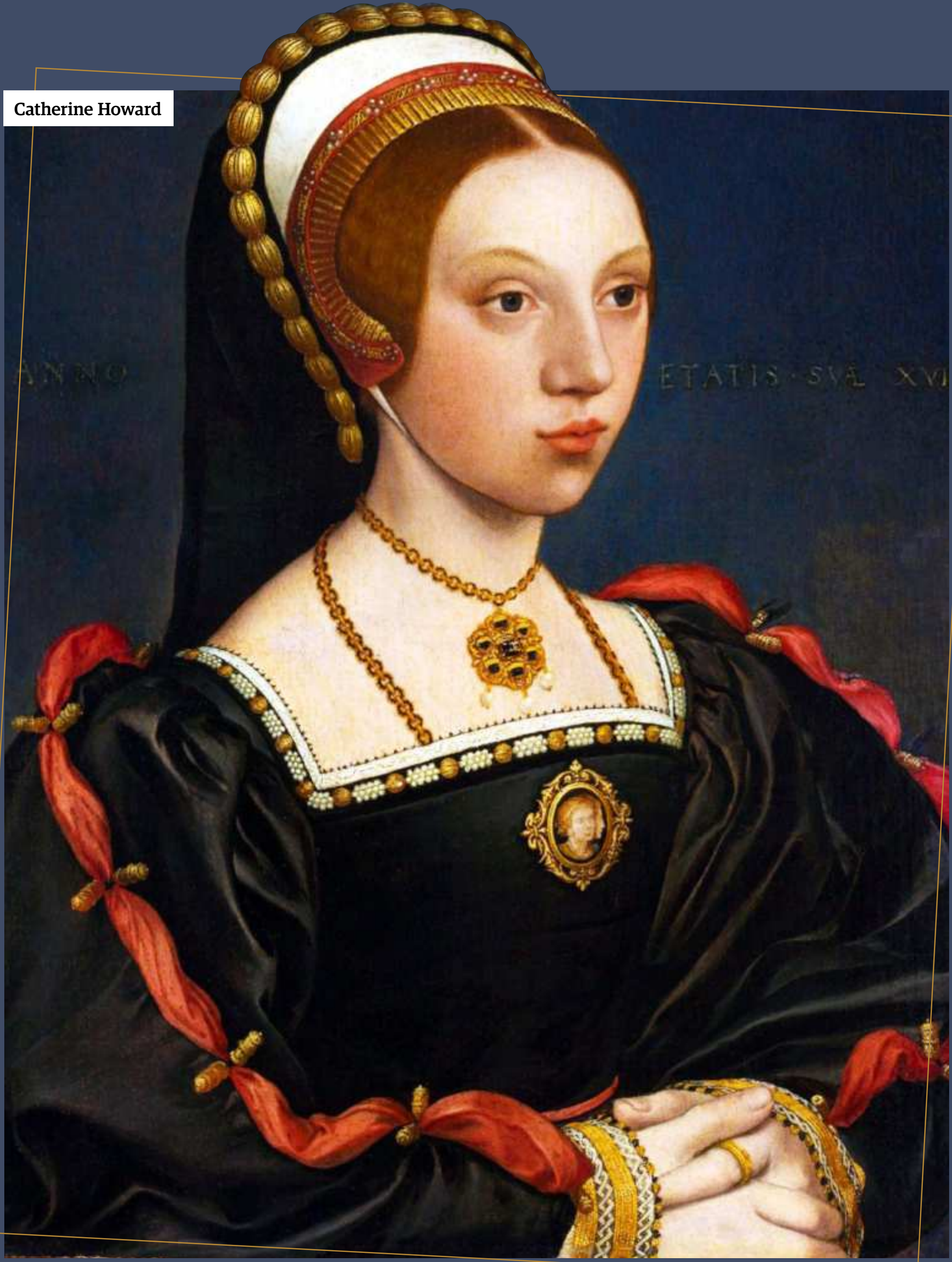
HOW HENRY'S WIVES INFLUENCED HIS DAUGHTERS' LIVES

As the daughters of Henry VIII, the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth had front row seats to the reigns of many of their father's wives. The daughters of Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn respectively, Mary and Elizabeth, witnessed from a young age the disrespect shown to their mother and stepmothers by their tyrannical father, which probably impacted their outlook on life as they grew up.

They had been educated to a high standard by leading humanist scholars, but this had been to ensure they would grow to be suitable consorts to foreign princes and aristocrats. While neither girl was ever expected to become queen, their brother, Edward, died at a young age and so each got the opportunity to rule. Both were powerful monarchs who, while holding differing religious beliefs, had strength in their convictions and worked hard to honour their ambitions for England.

Mary's childhood had been a troubled one, with her experiencing periods of isolation from her father and the English court after her parents divorced. Without the efforts of Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves and Catherine Parr, Mary may have remained estranged from her family and thus may never have been restored to the line of succession.

Elizabeth, though closer to her father than Mary, also benefited from the advocacy and love of her stepmothers. Anne of Cleves and Catherine Parr could both be characterised as surrogate mothers for Elizabeth, and both were smart and educated women who likely influenced Elizabeth's character as she grew up. In fact, parallels can be drawn between the independence of Anne of Cleves and the life Elizabeth committed herself to as queen.



Catherine Howard

CATHERINE HOWARD

c.1524-1542

The youngest of Henry's wives, Catherine Howard is often remembered as a promiscuous young girl who did not grasp the magnitude of her position as queen consort and the danger she put herself in with Henry. It is widely accepted that she engaged in relations with several men throughout her short life, both before and during her marriage to the King. Like her cousin, Anne Boleyn, Catherine was executed on Henry's orders after being charged with treason, but is it fair that her affairs make up the entirety of her legacy?

As queen consort, it is unsurprising that she did not have as much political and religious input as some of Henry's other wives. Catherine is estimated to have only been around 19 years old when she took on the position in 1540. However, one episode shows her willingness and ability to utilise the limited power she had within Henry's court. In 1541, Catherine appealed to the King to pardon Sir Thomas Wyatt, a poet and statesman who had been imprisoned on charges of treason. Henry granted Catherine her wish and Wyatt was released. It is also said that Catherine sent clothes to Margaret Pole, an elderly woman who was imprisoned and eventually executed by Henry. Maybe, if Catherine had been queen for more than just over a year, or had even lived a longer life, she would have continued in her activism.

CATHERINE PARR

1512-1548

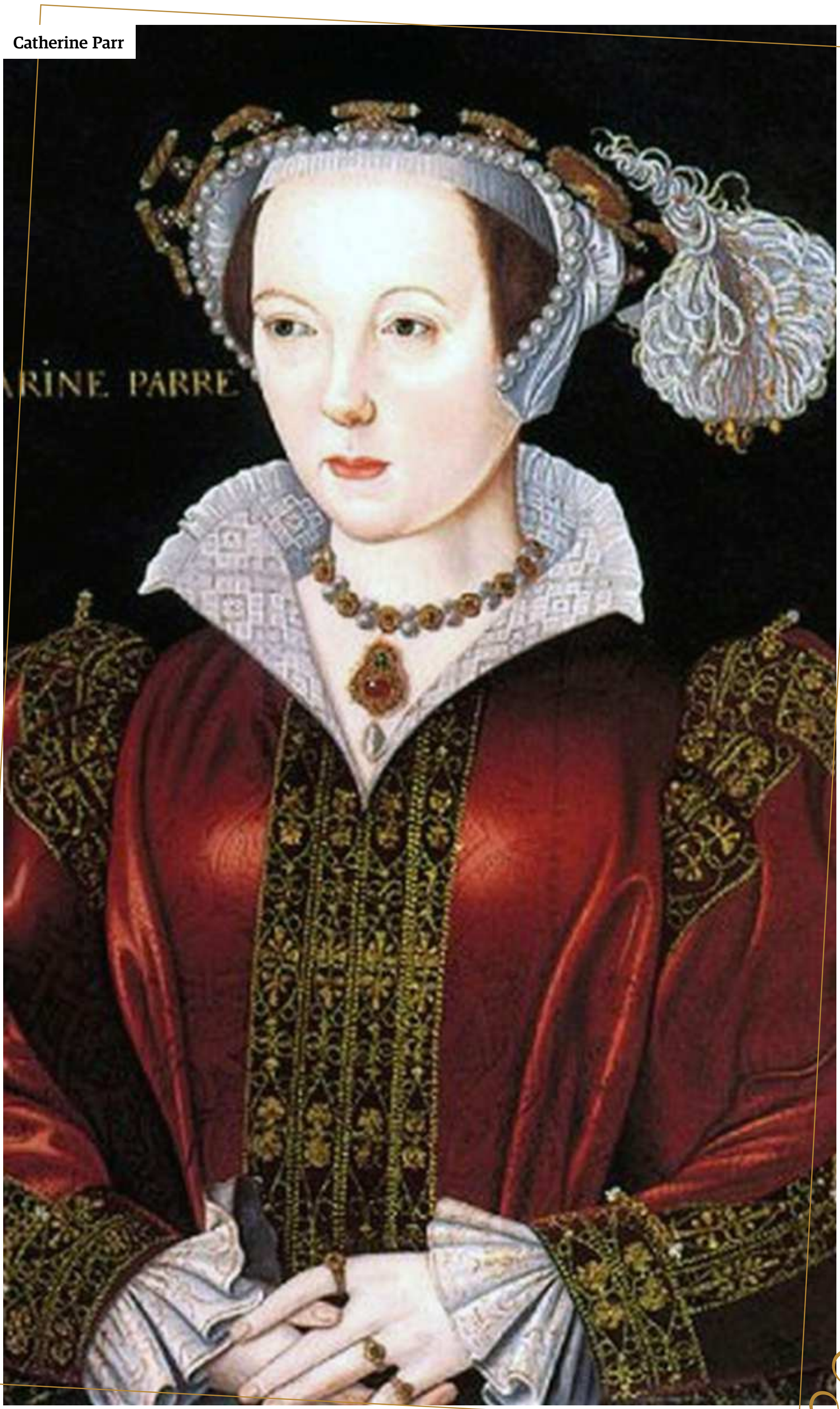
The last of Henry VIII's wives, Catherine Parr is often remembered as the most successful of the six due to the fact she managed to outlive Henry without suffering divorce or execution. However, Catherine's story may be the saddest in a romantic sense. Historians widely agree that Catherine was in love and hoped to marry Thomas Seymour after the deaths of her first two husbands. However, when the King set his eye on her, Catherine accepted her fate and married Henry in 1543, giving up a life with Seymour to do so.

As queen consort, Catherine involved herself in affairs of state. She acted as regent while Henry was away from court in 1544 but it was her passion for religious reform that came to define her reign. An intelligent and educated woman, Catherine translated and published religious texts, her first being *Psalms or Prayers* in 1544, which she did not put her name to. However, in 1545, Catherine published her second religious book, becoming the first woman to publish under her own name in England. Her outspoken approach to evangelical religious reform in England caused controversy at court and put her at odds with some influential courtiers. In 1543, Henry, who had grown tired of Catherine's opinions, and probably under the influence of Stephen Gardiner, signed a warrant for his wife's arrest. When Catherine heard of the warrant she begged for her life. Whatever she said clearly worked, and when soldiers came to arrest her the following day they found Catherine and Henry reconciled. She had escaped the fate of two of Henry's previous wives.

Catherine, like Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves before her, also took on a protective role with regards to her stepchildren. Despite having been married before, Catherine had never had her own children and she grew close to Mary, Elizabeth and Edward. When Henry died in 1547, Catherine became Princess Elizabeth's guardian and mentor. Catherine also eventually married Thomas Seymour, but died herself just over a year after Henry.

> *"Catherine published her second religious book, becoming the first woman to publish under her own name in England"*

Catherine Parr



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1547 – 1559

CATHERINE DE' MEDICI

The powerful Italian Queen of France whose political capabilities were eclipsed by one disastrous mistake

WRITTEN BY EMILY STANIFORTH

As the daughter of a prominent Florentine noble family, it was inevitable that Catherine de' Medici's destiny lay in the hands of the powerful men around her. A marriage was arranged for her and at the age of 14 she became the Duchess of Orléans as the wife of the second son of the King of France. Now part of a royal family, Catherine may never have expected to be queen, but in 1536 the heir to the French throne died suddenly. Catherine's husband, Henry II of France, became next in line and as a result, she was propelled into a new life.

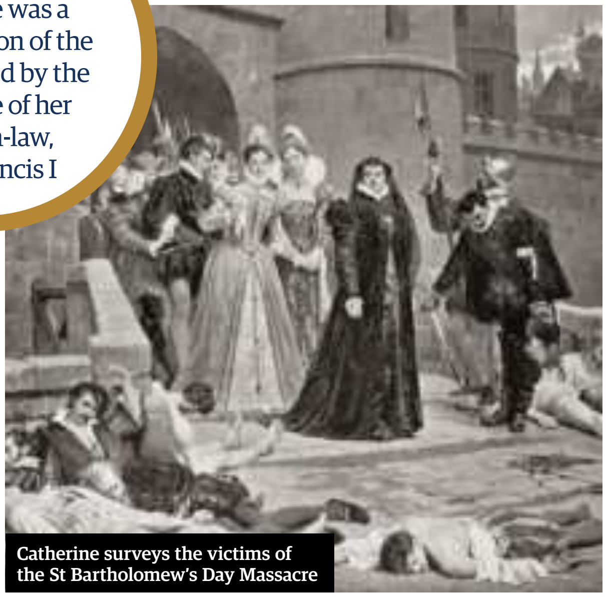
Catherine was crowned Queen of France in 1547 but had very little opportunity to exert any power. Her husband had taken a mistress who essentially acted as queen while Catherine was shunned. It was only after the death of Henry that Catherine was finally able to exercise her political capabilities for the first time.

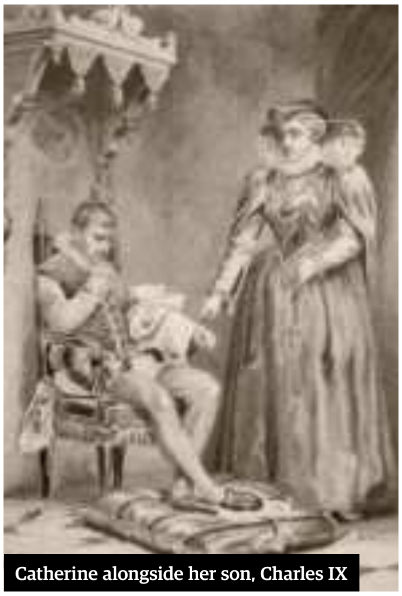
As her son was young, Catherine helped Francis II rule for a year until he died from illness. Catherine's second son, Charles IX, inherited the throne in 1560 and given his young age (he was ten years old), Catherine was officially declared regent of France.

In her capacity as regent, one of the biggest challenges Catherine faced was the conflict between the Catholics and Huguenots. As a Catholic herself, Catherine's initial policies towards the Huguenots were surprisingly placatory. She even arranged a marriage for her daughter to a Protestant nobleman. However, Catherine is believed to have been behind one of the bloodiest events of the Wars of Religion: the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572). After the failed assassination attempt of a prominent Protestant leader, Catherine feared a backlash from the Huguenots who suspected the assassination plot to be the work of Catholics. It was decided that the Protestant leaders would be killed and thousands of Huguenots were brutally slaughtered.

Catherine was a prolific patron of the arts, inspired by the patronage of her father-in-law, King Francis I

Catherine's influence began to wane, and after Charles' death in 1574 and the accession of her third son, Henry III, her grip on power had diminished. Catherine died in 1589, aged 69, and while she did much good during her time in power, including as a patron of humanism and arts, it is the events of St Bartholomew's Day that plague her legacy.


Catherine surveys the victims of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre


Catherine alongside her son, Charles IX

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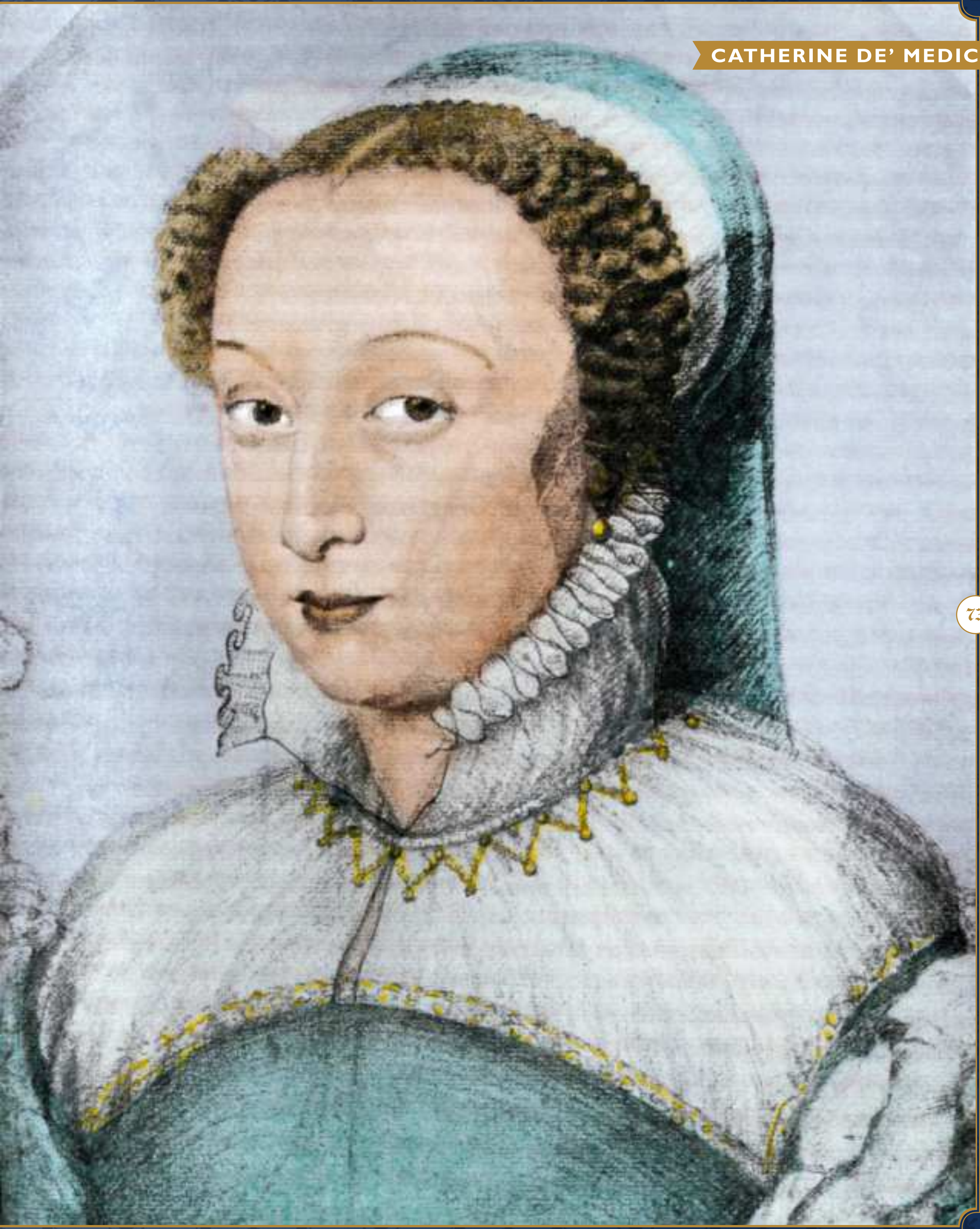


1533 – 1558

HURREM SULTAN

HASEKI SULTAN OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

From slave to harem and the throne itself, the life of Hurrem Sultan would be unbelievable, if it wasn't true

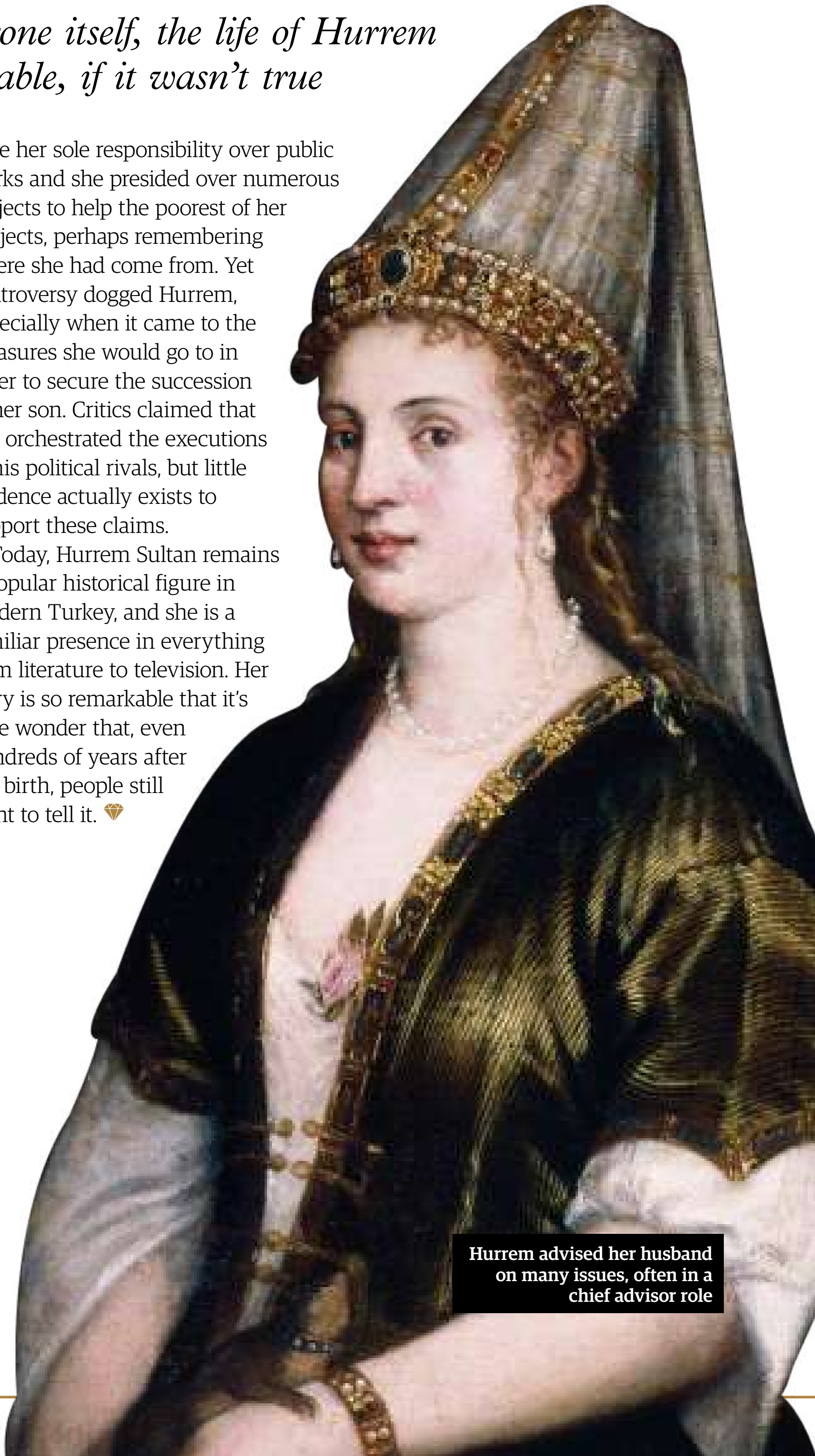
Though little is known of Hurrem Sultan's early life, historians believe that she was captured by Crimean Tatars in Ruthenia, which is now Ukraine. She was taken to the Crimean Peninsula and sold at a slave market, from which she was transported to Constantinople, the powerhouse of the Ottoman Empire, and placed into a second slave market. Here she was purchased as a gift for Suleiman the Magnificent, the heir to the throne of the Ottoman Empire. She was given the name Roxelana, meaning "a maid from Ruthenia", and put to work as a domestic servant in Suleiman's extensive harem.

How Hurrem came to meet Suleiman in person remains a mystery, with various romantic legends jostling for position, but meet him she did, and she swiftly became his favourite and most privileged concubine, seeing off other candidates for the role. She retained her position when Suleiman became Sultan and even bore him a son and heir - the first of their six children - but Suleiman wanted more for the woman he had come to love. In 1533, he emancipated Hurrem and married her, making her his queen. It was unprecedented in the history of the Ottoman Empire.

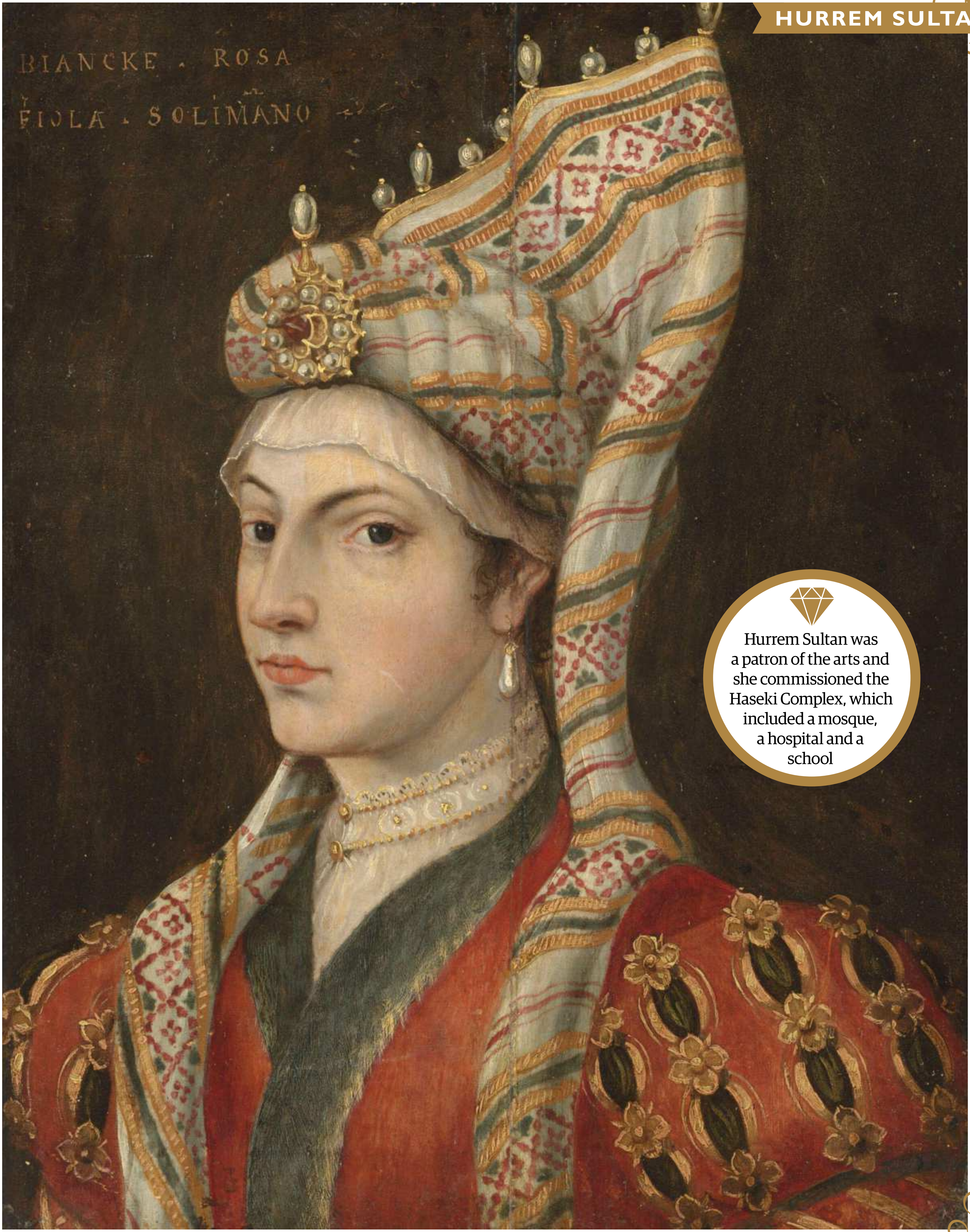
Hurrem was deeply intelligent and her husband trusted her above all others. She played a role in all aspects of his reign and took an active involvement in matters of foreign and domestic policy. Suleiman gave her sole responsibility over public works and she presided over numerous projects to help the poorest of her subjects, perhaps remembering where she had come from. Yet controversy dogged Hurrem, especially when it came to the measures she would go to in order to secure the succession of her son. Critics claimed that she orchestrated the executions of his political rivals, but little evidence actually exists to support these claims.

Today, Hurrem Sultan remains a popular historical figure in modern Turkey, and she is a familiar presence in everything from literature to television. Her story is so remarkable that it's little wonder that, even hundreds of years after her birth, people still want to tell it. ◆

> *"Hurrem was deeply intelligent and her husband trusted her above all others"*



Hurrem advised her husband on many issues, often in a chief advisor role


BIANCKE . ROSA
FIOLA . SOLIMANO

Hurrem Sultan was a patron of the arts and she commissioned the Haseki Complex, which included a mosque, a hospital and a school

© Alamy, Getty Images

1516 – 1558

MARY I

The first legitimate queen regnant of England, Mary was a devout Catholic whose love for her nation became lost in a bloody legacy

WRITTEN BY JAMES HOARE

Of all the dynasties to rule over England and its territories, few were as varied and impactful as the house of Tudor. Mary I, the first English queen to reign in her own right, was no exception. The eldest daughter of Henry VIII, she was defined by the turbulent religious metamorphosis England experienced in the early 1500s. In a time when religion and politics were inextricably intertwined, Mary would become a monarch so driven by her beliefs that she would murder hundreds of her own subjects in order to restore the sanctity of her own realm. But who was the woman behind the name 'Bloody Mary'? Was she really a bloodthirsty tyrant? Or was she a product of a country divided by the distinctions of its faith?

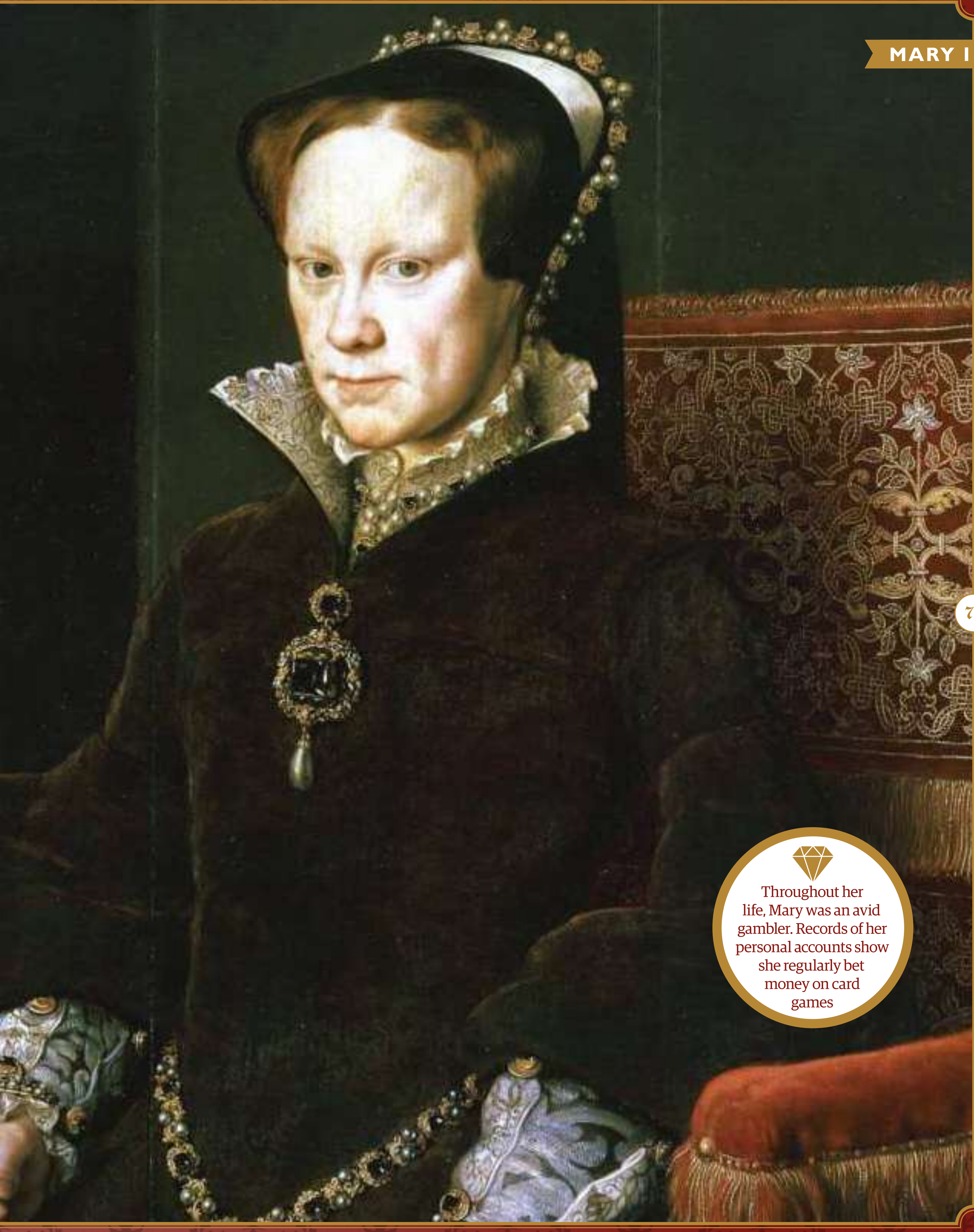
The answers find their roots in her early years. Born on 18 February 1516, Mary was the daughter of Henry VIII and his first wife Catherine of Aragon. Henry, a man not to be denied any desire, desperately wanted a son and heir to secure the house of Tudor's hold on the English throne – however, a series of miscarriages and the birth of a daughter only served to push the king further away from his Spanish queen. His pursuit of Catherine's maid of honour, Anne Boleyn, when Mary was around ten years old, would push Catherine further out of favour with Henry's court – and the young princess along with her.

> As a child, Mary entertained a group of French delegates by playing the virginal (harpsichord) at the age of four

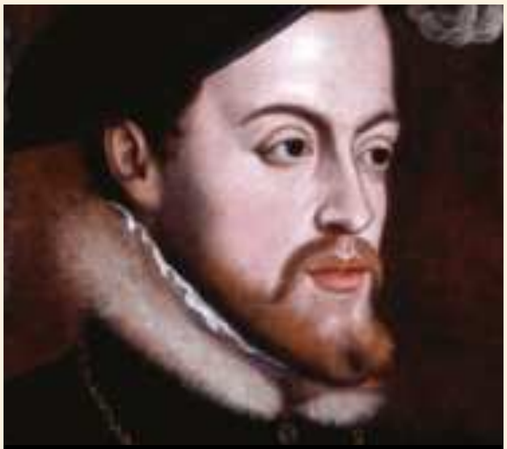
In early 1533, something happened that few could have predicted. Having already secretly married Anne Boleyn in January, and enraged at the pope's refusal to annul his first marriage to Catherine on the grounds it was unlawful in the eyes of God, Henry defied Rome and ended papal authority over the English crown. Henry then appointed himself supreme head of the English church and deemed his union to Catherine void. As a result, she was stripped of her title as queen and demoted to dowager princess of Wales, while Mary lost her princess status and instead gained the title 'The Lady Mary'. With her mother's marriage to the king in ruins, Mary was deemed illegitimate and no longer the heir apparent to the throne.

The year 1536 was another eventful one for Mary. Her mother Catherine passed away on 7 January. A few months later, tired of his second wife's inability to provide him with a son, Henry had Anne disgraced and eventually executed for a multitude of crimes. That year also saw the Pilgrimage of Grace, a political movement in the North of England that demanded the Act of Supremacy be repealed and Mary be reinstated as heir apparent – the rebellion came to nothing thanks to the king's merciless reaction, but it proved that Mary would always serve as a figurehead for the loyal papist plotters in the kingdom.

Mary attempted to create some distance between herself and the marital affairs of her father in the years that followed, but she remained the trump card of many a Catholic plot, including a supposed attempted marriage to Reginald Pole (an English cardinal who would eventually serve as archbishop of Canterbury under Mary's own reign). Mary enjoyed something of a better relationship with her father's sixth and final wife, Katharine Parr. Parr did her best to repair Mary's relationship with the king, with Henry eventually signing a revised Act of ▶



Throughout her life, Mary was an avid gambler. Records of her personal accounts show she regularly bet money on card games



Mary's husband Philip of Spain cared little for her and spent little time in England

Succession in 1544, which restored both Mary and Elizabeth as his legitimate heirs.

As Mary grew older, her dedication to her faith was always strong. Like many, she was forced to openly accept the king as her supreme ruler, but in secret her Catholic faith never wavered. When Henry died in 1547 and his only son Edward VI became king, England was launched into even stricter Protestant reform. As much a puppet for his guardians as he was a devout Anglican, Henry's young successor clashed regularly with Mary. The two rarely spent time together but when they did, the 15-year-old king was exasperated with his sister's barely veiled Roman Catholicism. When Edward passed away from what was most likely tuberculosis on 6 July 1553, Mary's right as heir apparent was struck another body blow when Edward defied the Act of Succession and named Lady Jane Grey, the daughter-in-law of one of his guardians, as his rightful heir.

Edward had invited Mary to visit him at his bedside, but Mary's advisors warned her that it was most likely a trap to imprison her, so she fled to the pro-Catholic county of East Anglia. With public support slipping following Grey's ascension, Mary and her allies amassed a sizable military force at Framlingham Castle in Suffolk and eventually marched on London and deposed Grey and her supporters. On 1 October, Mary was crowned Queen Mary I of England and, with the natural authority that gave her, she was finally ready to right the wrongs of her half-brother and father.

Now that she was queen, there was the important matter of finding a husband who provided the right political stability for England.

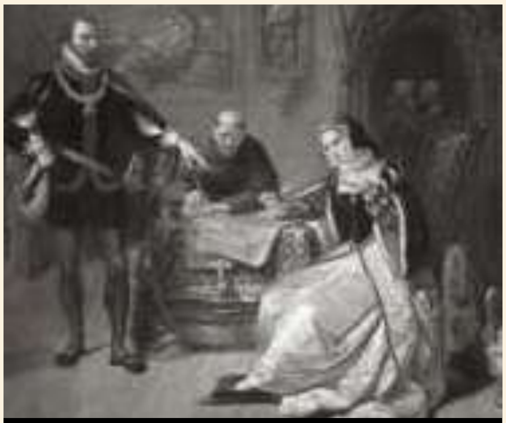
Keen to return the country to its former Catholic self, Mary became engaged to Prince Philip of Spain (the son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and heir to the Spanish throne).

The controversial union was far from a love match, but it was the first move that tied England to the Roman Catholic territories in Europe.

As England's first queen regnant (a queen made monarch by inheritance, not by marriage), the terms of the marriage were also amended to ensure that Mary's authority as queen could never be usurped by her husband. Mary and Philip were married on 25 July 1554, a mere two days after meeting for the first time in person.

Yet organising a political alliance with a powerful Catholic nation was no mean feat considering Mary had inherited a Protestant kingdom. Charles V and Prince Philip needed reassurance that

When Jane Seymour was pregnant with Edward, Mary sent her cucumbers to help with her cravings



This 1848 print depicts Mary as she signs the death warrant of her Protestant cousin, Lady Jane Grey

WAR WITH FRANCE

In January 1556, Mary's husband, Prince Philip of Spain, became King Philip II following his father's abdication. The Spanish monarch rarely visited Mary in England, but when he landed on English soil in March 1557 he came seeking her support for Spain's war with France. Mary, keen to preserve ties with such a powerful Catholic nation, was in favour of joining the conflict, but her closest allies persuaded her to hold off due to a wave of bad harvests and a tattered economy inherited from Edward VI's reign.

When Thomas Stafford, a noble who had already incited a rebellion against Mary in 1554, invaded England in June with the blessing and financial backing of the French king, Henry II, everything changed. The rebellion was put down fairly easily, but it was enough to convince Mary to commit to Philip's campaign. The decision was a disaster for England, both financially and politically. Not only did it place strain on the relationship between England and Rome (since Pope Paul IV was allied with the French monarch), it also led to the loss of Calais, the last territory England had control of on the mainland of Europe. It was a terrible blow for the country – so much so that Mary was quoted as saying, "When I am dead and opened, you shall find Calais lying in my heart."

Defining moment

Act of Supremacy

November 1534

Mary's father, Henry VIII, has grown tired of bowing to the will of papal authority in Rome. When Pope Clement VII refuses to grant him an annulment for his marriage to Mary's mother, the king has Cardinal Wolsey and Parliament draw up a new act that proclaims the monarch to be, "the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England." By breaking away from Rome, Henry begins a systematic Reformation that drains monasteries and funds and lands and secures Anglicanism as the one true faith in the kingdom.

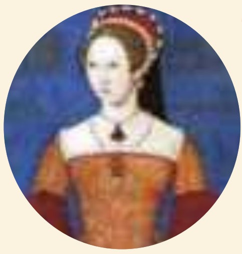
Timeline

1516

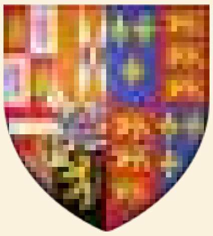
- **A princess is born**
  Daughter of King Henry VIII and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, Princess Mary is born at the Palace of Placentia in Greenwich, London. She is the first of many pregnancies not to end in miscarriage for the queen.
  18 February 1516

- **Mary is betrothed**
  In order to establish stable ties with France, Henry betroths the two-year-old princess to the Dauphin of France, the infant son of the French king, Francis I. Despite the potential strength of the arrangement, it falls apart three years later.
  1518

- **Another engagement ensues**
  With the potential marriage to the French king's young son in tatters, Henry is still determined to use his daughter as a pawn in another political alliance. Now six years old, Mary is betrothed to marry her second cousin, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. This too falls apart a few years later.
  1522



- **Princess of Wales**
  Mary is sent to Ludlow to preside over the Council of Wales and the Marches. She is only really there to represent the king while his courtiers preside for her. She is referred to as the Princess of Wales at this time, but is never officially granted the title by the king.
  1525



- **Act of Succession**
  After the ageing king marries Catherine Parr, his sixth and final wife, he finally relents to the idea of restoring his two daughters to the line of succession behind his son Edward. The Act of Succession 1544 effectively revokes Mary's illegitimacy.
  14 July 1543

- **Mary proclaimed queen**
  Following the death of her half-brother Edward VI, Mary has his named successor, Lady Jane Grey, imprisoned in the Tower of London. Citing the Act of Succession, Mary is proclaimed the new monarch.
  19 July 1553

> *"Mary demonstrated that a woman could rule in her own right"*

England was indeed committed to restoring the old ways. Mary's English Counter-Reformation began almost immediately with her first parliament in October deeming the marriage of her late parents valid while passing the First Statute of Repeal (which essentially negated all the religious legislation enacted during Edward VI's reign). Her father's Act of Supremacy was also rejected, with religious authority removed from the crown and returned to Rome.

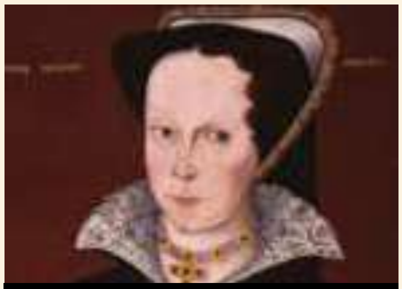
These changes were largely popular since England had only been a Protestant nation for six years, but such legislative restoration also came with a sting in the tail: the revival of the Heresy Acts. These acts deemed anyone practising any faith other than Roman Catholicism a heretic by proxy, leading to the voluntary exile of over 800 nobles who had refused to renounce their new faith. The Heresy Acts decreed that heretics should be beheaded or hanged, drawn and quartered; however the use of burning was also adopted. During Mary's reign, around 290 Protestants were executed - many of them burnt at the stake - for heresy, creating an air of aggressive persecution.

So was Mary really the bloodiest monarch of the Tudor line? Despite her dramatic nickname, Mary's brief Protestant purge was a single drop compared to the oceans of blood spilt by her predecessors. Edward VI had 5,500 rebels murdered in the Prayer Book Rebellion in 1549, while Henry VIII executed a staggering 72,000 people (including two of his own wives) during his reign, according to Holinshed's *Chronicles*. It was more the stark violence of Mary's executions during a time when Reformist and Counter-Reformist propaganda was flying around Europe that gave her actions such a lasting infamy.

Mary's reign only lasted five years and while it was marred by the mass burnings of Protestants and the largely disastrous alliance with Spain (which led to the embarrassing loss of Calais to France), Mary made some changes that ultimately benefited the kingdom. Financial reforms included changing the way the government collected taxes and the normalisation of import tax. She even used Philip's reluctance to include England in Spain's grip on the lucrative trade with the New World to create new trade opportunities with the east coast of Africa.

Mary died on 17 November 1558, and her attempts to restore England to its Catholic roots had left the country in religious and political turmoil. However, for all her violent acts of religious reform, and her poor choice of a marital alliance with Spain, Mary appears to have loved her country deeply. She also demonstrated that a woman could rule in her own right, setting a precedent upon which her half-sister and successor Elizabeth I would build. ◆

> The annual cost of the Great Wardrobe rose in the early part of her reign due to her taste for lavish materials and dresses



Mary I often indulged herself by buying expensive dresses from the continent

Landmarks in Mary's lifetime

IRISH SETTLEMENT

During her reign, Mary continued the Tudor conquest of Ireland by establishing a number of English settlements. These were placed in the Irish Midlands, effectively creating the King and Queen's counties. The two main towns were named Maryborough and Philipstown.

RAINY SEASON

The five years of Mary's rule were uncharacteristically rainy. Persistent rain for months on end led to oversaturated soil, which in turn ruined entire crops. This, and damage from flooding, plunged the country into famine.

A STRAINED ECONOMY

Poor weather conditions and harvests contributed to an already strained economic climate. Despite the alliance between England and Spain, trade between them was brittle at best. Spain refused to include England in its lucrative hold on the New World.

MARY AND MONEY

Mary made attempts to implement changes to the state of English currency and taxation. Prior to her reign, sheriffs had failed to adequately enforce and collect import taxes, so the queen has had new legislation drawn up that clearly defined new rules for efficiently taking incoming resources.

MONASTIC RESTORATION

While the lands confiscated in Henry VIII's Reformation were not relinquished by the crown, Mary was determined to help rebuild the monasteries that were torn apart decades before. She even used her own finances to restore a number of sites across the nation.

Mary is crowned
After riding into London in August with her half-sister Elizabeth and 800 supporting nobles, Mary releases the imprisoned Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, whom she makes lord chancellor. She is crowned by Gardiner at Westminster Abbey.
1 October 1553

Marriage to Prince Philip
Less than a week after dealing with the conspiracy to place Lady Jane Grey on the English throne, Mary marries Prince Philip, the son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Such a marriage blocks her Protestant half-sister's position as heir.
25 July 1554

The false pregnancy
Around September 1554 Mary's menstruation cycle stops - she then begins gaining weight as well as dealing with bouts of nausea. Mary takes this as a sign of pregnancy, but her belly recedes more than a year later. It was a phantom pregnancy.
Sep 1554 - Oct 1555

Burning Protestants
At the beginning of 1555, the restoration of Roman Catholicism in England leads to the return of the Heresy Acts. With religious doctrine on her side, Mary starts executing Protestant nobles. Burning at the stake is the most prevalent method and around 290 are executed in the purge.
February 1555

Defining moment

England drawn into war

March 1557

In January 1556, Prince Philip's father Charles V abdicates from the throne, effectively making Philip the new king. Often absent from Mary's side for great periods, the new Spanish monarch finally returns to England in March 1557. Philip has reignited the war with France (following a very brittle peace treaty between the two nations) and is keen to use his alliance with England to bolster his forces. War is officially declared in June, but the conflict causes strain with the papacy as Rome has political ties to the French king. The war is a political and economic disaster for England and even leads to the loss of Calais in January 1558.

Defining moment

The queen is dead

17 November 1558

As 1557 draws to a close, Mary appears to fall pregnant yet again. Sadly it proves to be another phantom term and the queen is forced to make the defining decision of her reign. In 1558 she names Elizabeth as her lawful successor. Mary falls ill during an influenza pandemic that is gripping London. It's not known whether it was the influenza that took her life or ongoing complications with ovarian cysts and uterine cancer.

1702

1533 – 1603

ELIZABETH I

She fought off foreign invasions and domestic rebellions but did she really preside over a golden age?

In 1588, against the advice of her most trusted aides, Elizabeth I rode out on her grey gelding to address her troops gathered at Tilbury in Essex in preparation of repelling the expected invasion force of the Spanish Armada. Looking out at the assembled faces before her, she delivered a speech that would go down in history and for many would forever define her: "I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king - and of a king of England too."

The speech would have to be transcribed and redistributed for the soldiers who were unable to hear the queen but they had all seen their monarch, armoured and on her steed, ready to stand by them to repel the Catholic invasion. This image of Elizabeth has been the key to our popular perception of her for centuries, but there's much more to her. Elizabeth was cunning and capricious, but she could be blinded by affection, if only temporarily. She was tremendously clever, with an almost unfailing sense of what her people wanted or needed from her, but had to see off foreign invasion attempts and homegrown rebellions. While she was sitting on the throne of England the country became acquainted with some of its greatest triumphs and darkest hours.

When Elizabeth came to the throne in November 1558, the whole of Europe was on tenterhooks. How would the new Protestant queen follow the reign of her Catholic sister Mary? With an unstable nation and conspiracies at home and abroad, the situation required diplomacy, intelligence and bravery; three qualities which Elizabeth had always had in ample supply.

Elizabeth's coronation was a stunning balancing act. With countless eyes waiting for any hint of overtly Protestant or Catholic gestures, Elizabeth managed to confound them all. Instead, the emphasis was elsewhere: Elizabeth's intention to restore England to a state of prosperity. The new queen knew that if she was to have any chance of surviving her early years she would need trusted and astute advisors, and chose William Cecil and Robert Dudley. Cecil had worked for Edward, survived the reign of Mary and was fiercely loyal to Elizabeth. In contrast, Dudley's appointment and favour with the queen had nothing to do with his abilities as a politician. He had known Elizabeth since childhood and her affection for him had only grown stronger, and rumours abounded that she spent the nights as well as the days with him.

Cecil disapproved of Dudley and agreed with the majority of Parliament that Elizabeth should marry as soon as possible. The eyes of France and Spain were fixed on England and it made sense for the queen to create a marriage alliance with one of these major powers for her and the country's safety. King Philip II made no secret of his desire to marry Elizabeth, but she had no interest in marrying Mary's former husband. Henry of Anjou was suggested as a match, but he was still a child. Elizabeth spoke instead of being married to her nation, but scandal struck when Dudley's wife Amy died suddenly after apparently falling down the stairs in 1560. It was rumoured that Dudley had committed the deed for his queen, and Elizabeth was forced to expel him from her court.

In 1561, Elizabeth's cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, returned to Scotland from France. ▶

> Elizabeth was highly educated and she was proficient in several languages including French and Latin

For many Catholics, Mary was the true successor and she did little to downplay those clamouring for a Catholic monarch. Her arrival was perfectly timed, as Elizabeth was on the verge of death due to smallpox. However, she recovered and, with the scandal over Dudley dissipating, Elizabeth chose him to be Lord Protector, bringing him back into her court, before shocking everyone by suggesting a marriage between him and Mary. This was Elizabeth showing her political astuteness; she knew well that Scotland with a Catholic heir would have too much power, but an heir produced by her favourite and Mary, Queen of Scots could potentially unite the two countries. However, Dudley refused and Mary had no interest in marrying her cousin's paramour.

Instead, Mary married for love, choosing Lord Henry Darnley. Seeing this may have prompted Elizabeth to renew her interest in Dudley, which greatly upset the council, in particular the ambitious Lord Norfolk. When the tension between Norfolk and Dudley grew too great, Elizabeth understood that she needed to assert her authority. "I will have here but one mistress and no master," she told Dudley. It was both a political statement and a personal one. The lack of a husband and heir was only made worse in 1566 when Mary gave birth to a son, James, but she was desperately unhappy. Darnley was a violent, drunken husband: many believed he brutally murdered her secret lover, David Rizzio. Darnley would meet his own nasty end a year later, when he was found strangled in the garden of a house. Mary quickly married the Earl of Bothwell, the man who had allegedly murdered Darnley, and Scottish forces rose against her. Imprisoned and forced to abdicate, she eventually fled to England. Elizabeth agreed to give Mary shelter, but her arrival in the north had given Catholics a figurehead and rebellion brewed.

The northern Earls suggested that Norfolk should marry Mary: soon, the Northern Rebellion had begun. As the rebel forces marched south, Elizabeth moved Mary to Coventry and mustered troops of her own. The southern Earls rallied to her cause, which stunned the rebel forces, who began to retreat. Elizabeth's victory was quick and decisive, with 700 men being executed in a brutal display of power. Norfolk was placed under arrest, but a lack of concrete evidence postponed his execution, until he was implicated in the Ridolfi plot, which aimed to make Spain's Philip II king. Elizabeth ordered and rescinded Norfolk's execution three times - a prime example of how indecisive she could be at times - before finally deciding that he simply had to die.

If Elizabeth's position at home appeared shaky it was positively stable compared to how she was viewed abroad. The Pope decreed that anyone who murdered the heretical English queen would be forgiven, a statement King Philip took to heart. Not wanting to risk open war, Elizabeth found other ways to aggravate her enemies. She quietly patronised the piratical exploits of John Hawkins and later his cousin Francis Drake. In 1577, when he planned to travel to South America to raid Spanish gold, Elizabeth met Drake with Francis Walsingham, one of her ambassadors to France.

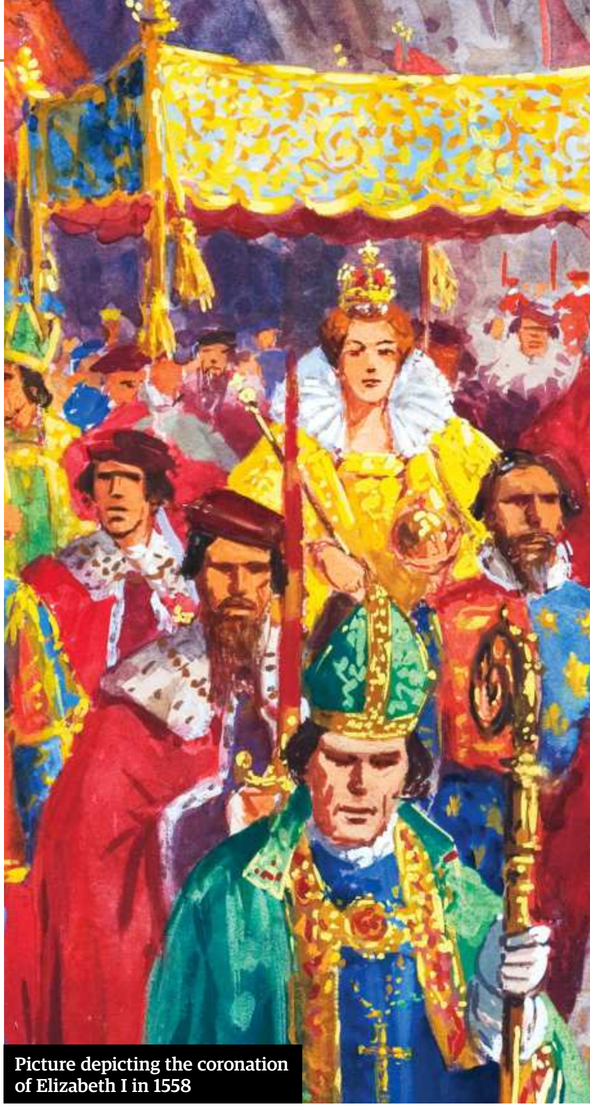
The cautious Cecil had to be kept in the dark, but she told Drake explicitly that she supported him: "I would gladly be revenged on the King of Spain for diverse injuries I have received." Having sailed through the Straits of Magellan and captured a Spanish ship carrying up to £200,000 in gold, Drake decided to sail across the Pacific, becoming the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe. Elizabeth gloried in his achievement, and when she met the Spanish ambassador in 1581, she pointedly wore a crucifix Drake had given to her from the loot. She dined with Drake on the Golden Hind and knighted him. He had done her proud.

These piratical exploits stood in sharp contrast to the events of 1572. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris - the assassination of a number of French Calvinist Protestants - shocked England and the ambassador Sir Francis Walsingham was forced to take refuge. Elizabeth brought him back to London to become her spymaster, where he advised that Mary, Queen of Scots was a real danger. The uprising was not only a shocking scene for English Protestants; it was also a sign that the Protestant Netherlands and their booming wool trade would soon be in danger.

When William the Silent asked Elizabeth for military assistance, she did not want to be seen to intervene and give Philip of Spain an excuse to attack. Walsingham counselled war, while Cecil continued to preach marriage. So Elizabeth entertained the idea of marrying the Duke of Anjou, roughly ten years after it had first been suggested. Then, he had been an ugly youth and she had been a beautiful queen. Now, she was visibly older and the flattery of the French ambassador and Anjou's letters began to win her over. When they finally met, it appeared that Elizabeth really was in love, but there were genuine concerns over how the English people would react.

Elizabeth's long reign provided welcome stability for her kingdom after the short-lived reigns of her siblings

"The anxieties Elizabeth expressed to the emissary of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1561, that she too could not marry anyone without triggering unrest in one group or another, only deepened following Mary, Queen of Scots's disastrous marriages to Darnley and then Bothwell - which ended in her overthrow," explains Leanda de Lisle, author of Tudor: The Family Story. "Elizabeth continued to look publicly for a husband to fulfil national expectations that she would provide them with an undisputed heir, and surely she hoped it was not impossible. She was married to her kingdom - a phrase she had learned from Mary Tudor. But while Mary had married, Elizabeth did not because she feared revolt by those who disapproved of her choice."


Picture depicting the coronation of Elizabeth I in 1558

Although she clearly wanted to marry the man that she had nicknamed her "frog," the English people found the idea of their Virgin Queen marrying a French Catholic absolutely repulsive. When a pamphlet appeared that condemned the union, Elizabeth decreed that both the author and his printer should have their right hands cut off. Her Privy Council was split in half, with the jealous Robert Dudley vehemently opposed. Elizabeth was heartbroken, but she agreed to abstain. She gave Anjou £10,000 to continue his war against Philip in the Netherlands, but did not see him again. He tried to take power for himself but failed and died a year later. When William the Silent was assassinated in his own house in 1584 by a Catholic fanatic, it was clear that military intervention could not be put off any longer and so in 1585, to the relief of her impatient councillors, she agreed to send a small force of men. Dudley took command in the Netherlands but proved to be incompetent, losing territory to Philip's general, the Duke of Parma. Mary was now more dangerous than ever. Elizabeth ordered her imprisonment at the urging of Francis Walsingham, who had no intention of allowing her to live much longer. He arranged for a servant, one of his own spies, to suggest that Mary smuggle letters in beer barrels, allowing Walsingham to read everything. When Thomas Babington wrote to Mary with a plan to assassinate Elizabeth and give her the crown Mary wrote back

with her approval; the spymaster's trap had worked perfectly, and he had ensnared his unwitting prey.

Walsingham ordered the conspirators' execution. Elizabeth had always been reluctant to execute her cousin, but she agreed she would have to stand trial. It was no surprise when the court decided that Mary should be put to death. Elizabeth grieved for Mary, or at least lamented her death. The man who had delivered the warrant was imprisoned and stripped of his title.

Elizabeth was always reluctant to sign a death warrant - or at least she was reluctant to be seen to sign it. We can't know how much of Elizabeth's grief was genuine, but she bitterly resented the circumstances of Mary's execution.

"Elizabeth was reluctant to be seen to execute first the senior nobleman in England, in Norfolk, and then a fellow queen, in Mary," says de Lisle: "That is not to say she regretted their deaths. She would have preferred to have Mary murdered, for example, as she made very clear.

It is also notable that she was quite ruthless in ordering the deaths of traitors of humble birth - the 900 or so executed after the Northern Rebellion testifies to that. This was three times the numbers Henry VIII had executed after the far more serious Pilgrimage of Grace, and ten times the numbers Mary executed after Wyatt's revolt."

Mary's execution provided Philip II with the reason he needed to declare war and his Spanish Armada co-ordinated with the Duke of Parma's forces in the Netherlands, with the two forces meeting before sailing on England.

Was a religious compromise met?

The Church of England was one of compromise and middle ground. While Elizabeth was a Protestant, she didn't hold the puritanical beliefs of some of her council members. She introduced the Act of Supremacy in 1558, which reaffirmed England's separation from Rome and established her as the head of the Church. Elizabeth understood the dangers of trying to impose religion and allowed Catholicism to continue, provided it took place in secret.

However, Leanda de Lisle reminds us that we should not forget Elizabeth's willingness to crack down when necessary. "Elizabeth's conservatism and pragmatism has seen her described as a religious moderate, in contrast to the 'fanatical' Mary," she explains. "But as the new Protestant Queen of a largely Catholic country Elizabeth was necessarily moderate, and as her reign grew longer, she proved that, like Mary, she could be utterly ruthless when faced by a threat. The hundreds of executions of villagers following the Northern Rebellion far exceeded anything her predecessors had done in similar circumstances; her later persecution of Catholics was also relentless and cruel. It is a little-known fact that she also burned heretics - namely Anabaptists - these were far fewer in number than Mary's victims, but then there weren't that many Anabaptists!" She executed both Protestants and Catholics for publicly disobeying the laws of the Church of England. However, events in Europe show the English Queen in a much more favourable light. Comparatively, Elizabeth was extremely tolerant. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris showed the fervour with which Catholic Europeans detested Protestants. She was also much more tolerant than many of her advisors.

VERDICT

Elizabeth successfully found a moderate middle ground in a very turbulent time during her reign, but would crack down mercilessly if the rules she had laid down were broken.

VS

Catholic	C of E
1 The services were held in Latin, countermanding the reformation's ideal that everyone should be able to understand. The English prayer book was banned.	**1** The image of the minister became much simpler. They were not allowed to wear Roman Catholic vestments, such as the surplice.
2 Church furnishings were restored to their former lavish state and the buildings were now decorated completely with Catholic artwork.	**2** All rood lofts, a screen portraying the crucifixion, a common feature in Catholic churches, were removed. The Pope was not the head of the church.
3 Catholic Mass was reintroduced, and Holy Communion was now banned by law.	**3** The Bishop's Bible, which was in English rather than Latin, was restored, opening it up to a wider readership.
4 The clergy were not allowed to marry. Priests who had married before the new law came into effect were given a choice of two options: leave their families or lose their job.	**4** There was a general removal of 'superstition', such as making the sign of the cross during communion. Simplicity was what the Puritans strived for.

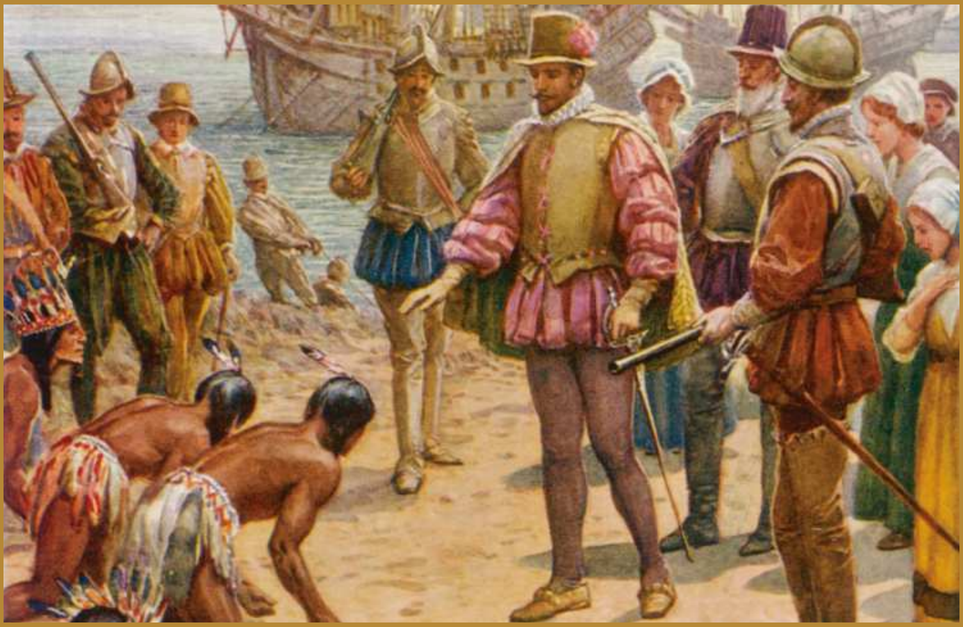
> *"The queen's reprisal was brutal and swift, executing not only the ringleaders, but also Jane Grey"*

They launched on 12 July 1588, their forces possessing more than twice the number of English ships, but the English ships did have some advantages; they were smaller, faster, and designed to carry guns rather than men. The English ships could outmanoeuvre the Spanish fleet in open water and began to engage them in small skirmishes. It was at this point that Elizabeth rode out to meet her troops. With the threat of a Catholic force at their doorstep, the queen rallied the spirit of the English troops by declaring that she would fight by their side to repel anyone who dared to set foot on their land.

This grandstanding was impressive and may have gone down in history's annals but was ultimately unnecessary. The Spanish Armada failed and Elizabeth's victory was the seal on her status. 'The Golden Age' had begun, where art and literature flowered. With England a visibly powerful state, the aristocracy began to patronise the arts with great abandon.

The famous playwrights of the age enjoyed patronage, albeit with some caveats. When Shakespeare wrote Richard II he was encouraged to remove a scene suggesting the ageing monarch should step aside. "Elizabeth did not care for plays," confirms de Lisle: "All too often they were used to lecture her on this or that."

Her crown may have been safe for now, but she received devastating blows with the deaths of two of her most trusted advisors, Dudley and Walsingham. Dudley was replaced ▶



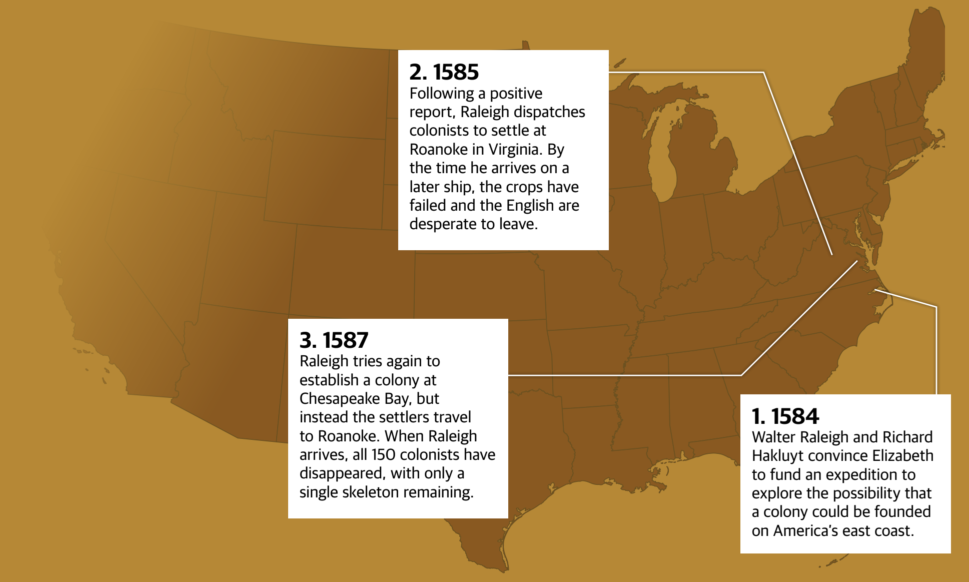
Did Elizabeth have a genuine thirst for new worlds?

Although the expansion of trade into India occurred during Elizabeth's reign, in terms of exploration she is best remembered for England's attempt to colonise North America. The Spanish and Portuguese had already laid claim to much of South America, establishing lucrative trade routes, but North America was relatively unexplored. Elizabeth was reluctant to fund exploratory voyages for much the same reasons that she was reluctant to fund wars: they were expensive and risky. However, she could be won around with the promise of riches from one of her favourites. So, when sailor Davy Ingram returned to England with tales of riches and simple inhabitants, geographer Richard Hakluyt began plotting a serious expedition to be led by Walter Raleigh.

With the promise of fortune and the flattery of Raleigh, she agreed to a trip to form a colony named after her: Virginia. The first party launched, and Raleigh would follow. When the nobleman arrived, he saw the settlement had failed. The English were desperate to leave. Raleigh's second attempt was intended for Chesapeake Bay, but the first group, led by John White, returned to Roanoke. Raleigh arrived with his second group and found no trace of survivors. Elizabeth was disappointed that these costly ventures had yielded no results. There was one purpose to these expeditions, as de Lisle explains very simply: "Making money."

VERDICT

The Elizabethan era's reputation for exploration is largely due to the fact that there was money to be made from it. Piratical ventures were profitable; colonisation was not.



2. 1585
Following a positive report, Raleigh dispatches colonists to settle at Roanoke in Virginia. By the time he arrives on a later ship, the crops have failed and the English are desperate to leave.

3. 1587
Raleigh tries again to establish a colony at Chesapeake Bay, but instead the settlers travel to Roanoke. When Raleigh arrives, all 150 colonists have disappeared, with only a single skeleton remaining.

1. 1584
Walter Raleigh and Richard Hakluyt convince Elizabeth to fund an expedition to explore the possibility that a colony could be founded on America's east coast.

> *"The Queen rallied troops by declaring that she would fight by their side to repel anyone who dare set foot on their land"*

at court by his handsome stepson, the Earl of Essex, and the young flatterer quickly became her new favourite.

"Robert Dudley's death in 1588 signalled the passing of the old order, but Elizabeth still hoped she could continue ruling according to her motto, 'Semper Eadem' ('Always the same')" explains de Lisle. "As the years began to pass and her servants died she either did not replace them or find a near-equivalent to the servant she had lost." It's a sign of how much she leaned on her old guard that she continued to place her trust in William Cecil, even though he was almost entirely deaf and increasingly ill. It was only when he died in 1598 that Elizabeth finally agreed to appoint Robert Cecil to his father's old post. When it became known that the Spanish were attempting to rebuild their fleet, Essex led a fleet on Cadiz and decimated their forces in port. The success gave Essex fame, something Elizabeth was taken aback by. She tried to curb him, aware that her standing among the people was her greatest asset, but Essex continued to promote his own celebrity. She became more and more frustrated with his outrageous behaviour at court, which came to a dramatic head when he half-drew his sword on her in a fit of pique.

The arts and literature may have been flourishing, but those who subscribe to this being a golden age in England's history often forget that even after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, other uprisings, such as the 1598 Irish rebellion, occurred. Now, with a Spanish-backed uprising, Elizabeth needed to take decisive action.

She sent her army at the start of 1599, led by Essex, who was looking to prove himself once more. He was a disaster. Rather than confronting Tyrone on the battlefield, he met him in secret and returned to England having made a treaty without the queen's authority.

When Essex thought Cecil was plotting against him, he rushed to plead his case. Assuming he was still the queen's favourite, he burst into her chamber while she was preparing for the day. He had seen Elizabeth without her make-up and regal dress; not as a queen but as an old woman. She could not afford to be seen like this. She dismissed him before summoning him later to confront him with his failures and strip him of power. Rather than accepting his fate, Essex attempted rebellion.

He assumed Londoners would back the popular war hero, but Elizabeth proclaimed him a traitor and sent her troops to meet him. The rebellion was a failure and Essex was executed.

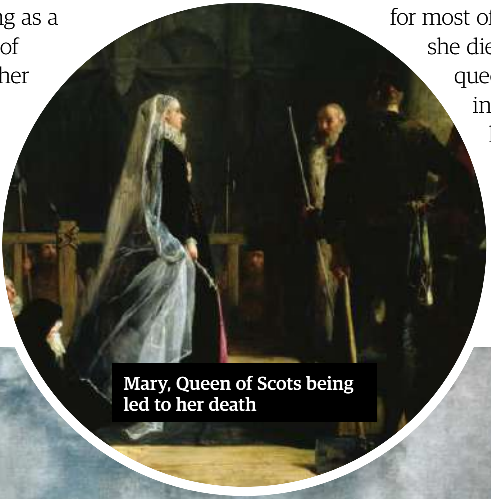
Although the later years of Elizabeth's reign were far from golden, she could still rally her people when needed. The war in Ireland was expensive and unsuccessful, while overcrowding and failed harvests caused agitation. When Parliament publicly condemned her for granting monopolies to her favourite courtiers, which had led to price-fixing, Elizabeth was forced to address them in 1601. She agreed to put a stop to the monopolies and she reaffirmed her love for England. She won over Parliament, there was a good harvest, and a truce was reached in Ireland and Spain. "Elizabeth, old and ill, did lose some of her former grip, but never entirely," states de Lisle. "She had followed Mary I's example in wooing the common people from the beginning of her reign, and they continued to support her."

Having seen off another uprising, the 50-year-old monarch's health was failing and after a period of good health, Elizabeth grew sickly. She was desperately frustrated by Cecil's growing power over her. Elizabeth finally died on 23 March 1603. Although she had struggled to change with the times in the face of younger, ambitious advisors, she had been a formidable political operator. She had still shown the cunning and cleverness to understand her situation, and had never lost the image of a queen loved by her people.

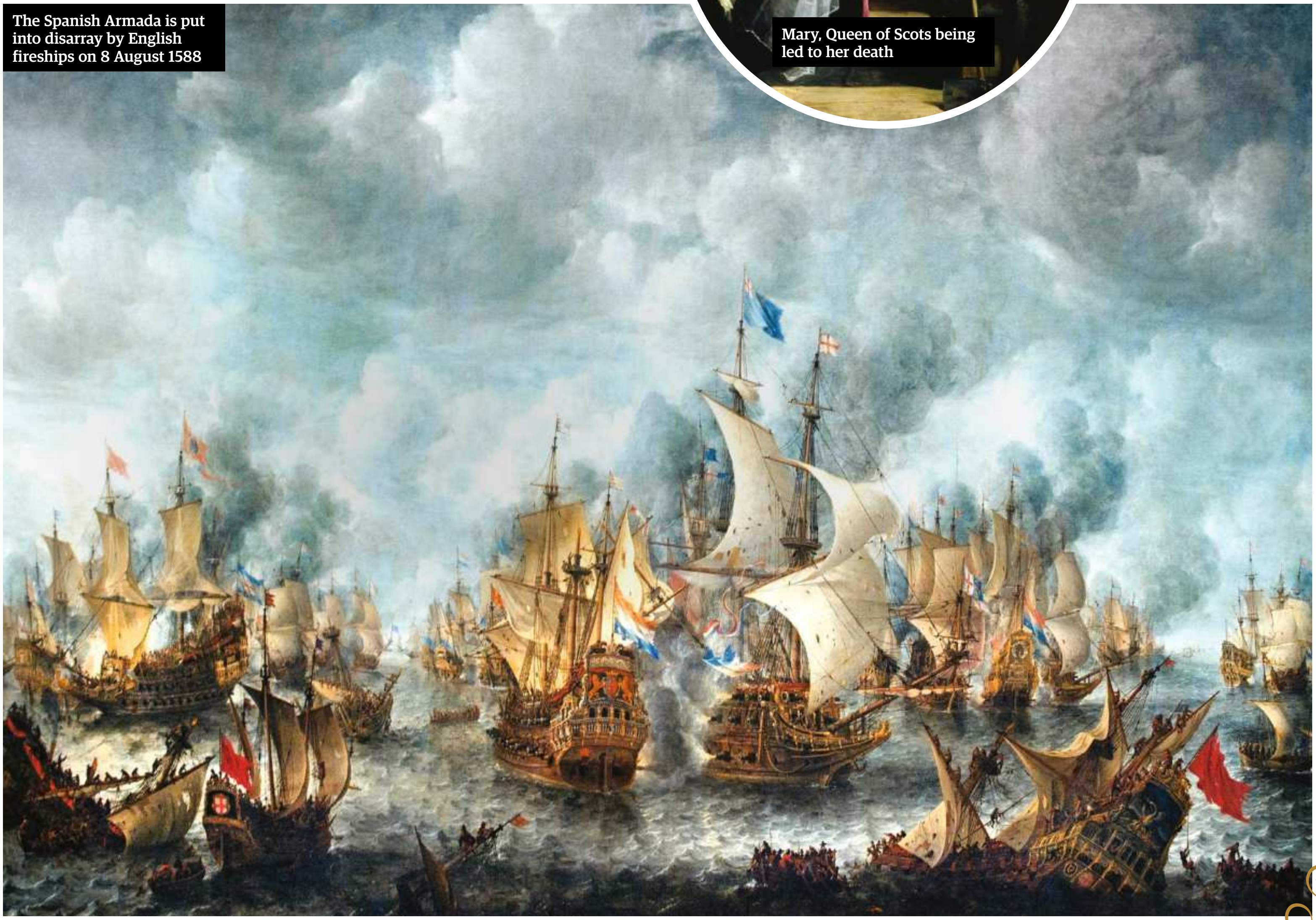
"That image was not created for her," explains de Lisle. "Elizabeth never forgot the events of 1553 when the ordinary people had backed the Tudor sisters, while the political elite had supported Jane Grey." Nor did she forget how in 1554, Mary had made a speech at the Guildhall that roused London in her defence against the Wyatt rebellion. Mary had spoken of her marriage to her kingdom, describing her coronation ring as a wedding band, and her love of her subjects as that of a mother for her children. These were the phrases and motifs that Elizabeth would use repeatedly.

In addition, Elizabeth also had an instinct for the crowd's demands. Even her enemies would admit she had 'the power of enchantment'. She wooed her people with smiles, words of love and great showmanship, and so won their hearts. Elizabeth's people would never forget her.

Elizabeth's reign was not the golden age that legend so often depicts; she faced serious uprisings, both internal and external, during her reign. She was capable of heartlessness and ruthlessness, and could be indecisive and impetuous. During her reign, England saw famine, rebellion and war. However, there is no mistaking her dedication to her country and her determination to listen to what the people wanted from her - and then give it to them. She walked a political tightrope for most of her life, and the fact that she died peacefully in her bed as queen was a major triumph in itself. The English loved her, and she, in turn, loved them. In the hearts and minds of many of her subjects, she was - and will always be - Britain's golden monarch. ◆



Mary, Queen of Scots being led to her death



The Spanish Armada is put into disarray by English fireships on 8 August 1588

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GREATEST CONSORTS

Not every queen is born to the role; queen consorts attain their crowns through marriage, but they can still leave a mark on history

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

Some queens are born to inherit the crown, the latest in a long - or not so long - family line of monarchs and empire builders. For others, it is a role that they attain through marriage, whether those marriages were to their taste or not. Plenty of born-to-rule queens have cemented their place in history and so have plenty of consorts. Whether serving as regents, giving shrewd political council or keeping the home fires burning and the wheels of a nation turning, these queen consorts were all women to be reckoned with.

> *"Plenty of born-to-rule queens have cemented their place in history and so have plenty of consorts – all women to be reckoned with"*

BERTHA OF KENT

The canonised queen

KENT, C.580 – C.601

Born as a Frankish princess, Bertha married the pagan Æthelbert of Kent when she was 15. The marriage was only arranged on condition that the young bride be allowed to continue to practice her religion and she arrived in England with her personal chaplain, to find that a church on the edge of Canterbury had been restored for her personal use. Today, St Martin's Church is recognised as the oldest Christian church in the English-speaking world.

In 597, Bertha welcomed the missionaries of Pope Gregory the Great, who had come to Canterbury hoping to restore Christianity to its people. Her influence led to the establishment of Christianity in Canterbury and the eventual building of the Cathedral there. Her vital role in the Christianisation of her Anglo-Saxon marital kingdom led to her canonisation as a saint.

A bronze statue of Bertha of Kent situated on Lady Wootton's Green, Canterbury

EMMA OF NORMANDY, QUEEN OF ENGLAND, DENMARK AND NORWAY

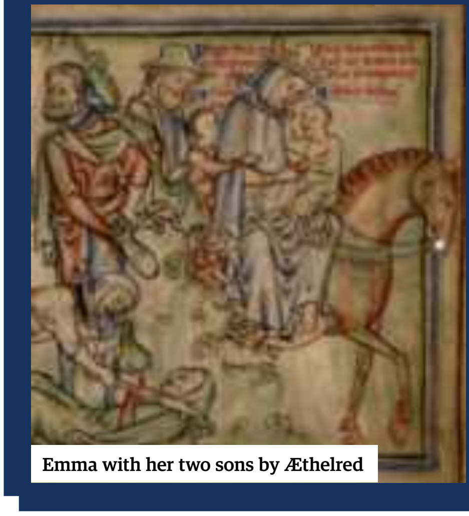
A major force in her own right

ENGLAND: 1002 – 1013, 1014 – 1016, 1017 – 1035
DENMARK: 1018 – 1035
NORWAY: 1028 – 1035

Emma of Normandy was a key political figure in 11th-century England. She was the wife of two kings, Æthelred the Unready and Cnut the Great, and the mother of two kings, Edward the Confessor and Harthacnut. Her decision to marry Cnut, following his invasion in 1016, likely saved the lives of her and Æthelred's exiled sons, as Cnut made efforts to eliminate any potential rivals to the English throne.

Emma gained various properties during her first marriage and she eventually became queen of Denmark and Norway through her second one. She was an advisor to Cnut during his reign and after she was widowed, she commissioned a biography, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, which detailed her role during Cnut's reign and the reigns of his successors.

It has been argued that Emma's marriage to Æthelred tied the dukes of Normandy to the Anglo-Saxon kings, giving the Normans a claim to the English throne. Indeed, her Norman great-nephew, William the Conqueror, invaded and became king of England in 1066.



Emma with her two sons by Æthelred

Eleanor of Castile's tomb effigy is one of few existing depictions of the queen

ELEANOR OF CASTILE, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

Patron of the arts

ENGLAND, 1272 – 1290

Regardless of popular legend, while Eleanor of Castile may not have sucked the poison out of her husband's wounds, she was still an influential and powerful queen consort. She was the wife of Edward I, with whom she enjoyed a loving and mutually devoted relationship, and she even joined her husband when he went crusading. In fact, she gave birth while on the road with him in Wales, conducting a military campaign.

Eleanor was a talented businesswoman with a shrewd eye for investments, though her business decisions didn't always endear her to the public. She was also a passionate patron of the arts who voraciously devoured literature, and even encouraged the use of ornate rugs and tapestries in English homes, a tradition she brought with her from her home in Spain.

DOROTHEA OF BRANDENBURG, QUEEN OF DENMARK, NORWAY, SWEDEN

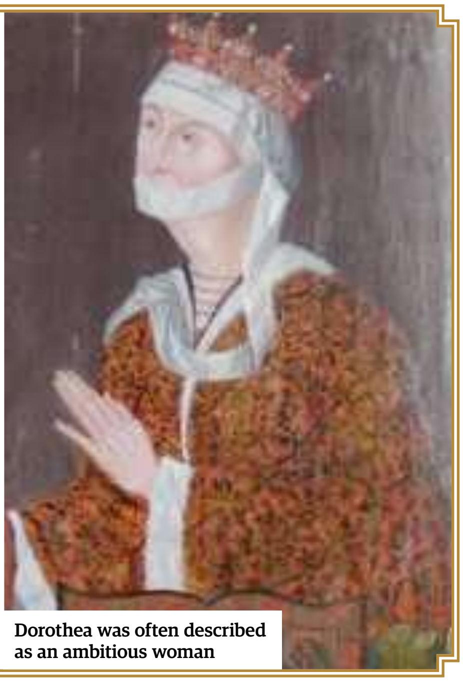
A queen of three kingdoms

DENMARK, 1445 – 1448, 1449 – 1481
NORWAY, 1445 – 1448, 1450 – 1481
SWEDEN, 1445 – 1448, 1457 – 1464

Dorothea is the second queen on this list to have married two kings: Christopher III, King of Denmark, Norway and Sweden and his successor, Christian I, King of Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

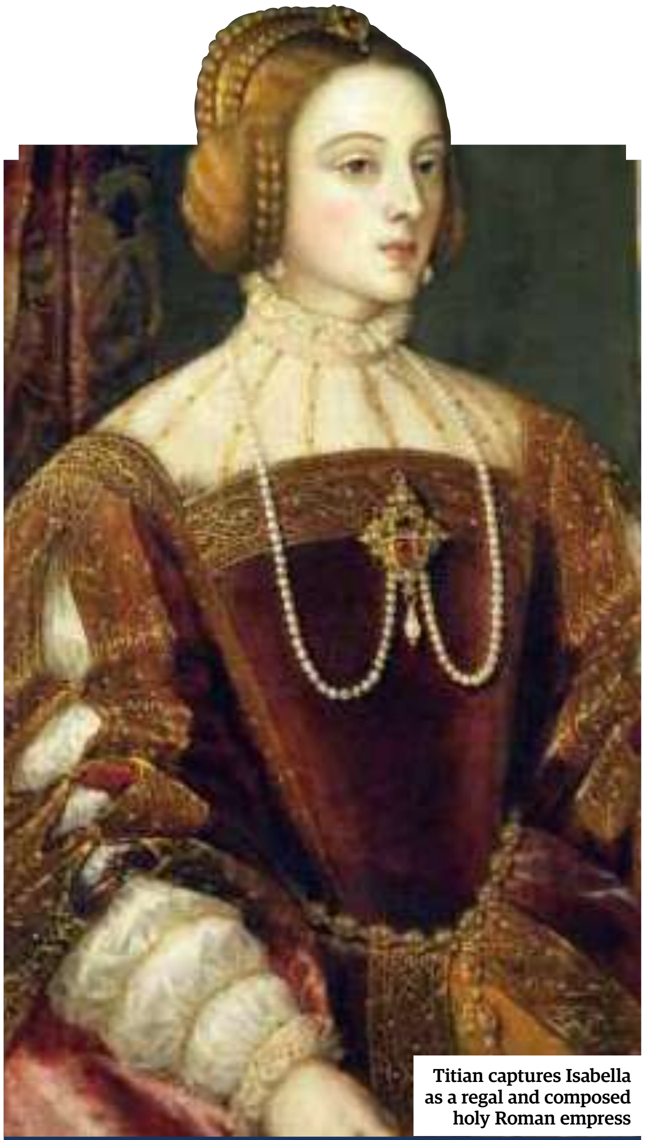
Her first marriage lasted three years before Christopher died in January 1448, childless. Dorothea subsequently became the regent of Denmark for eight months while waiting for the new monarch to be elected. The candidate chosen was Christian of Oldenburg, who wed Dorothea in 1449 and then went on to be ruler of both Norway and Sweden.

Dorothea was efficient and frugal, which helped pay off the debts of her husband, and she acted as regent during his absences. She remained politically influential during the reigns of their two surviving sons, John and Frederick, who both became kings of Denmark and Norway, the former of whom also reigned over Sweden. Margaret, their daughter, became queen consort of Scotland.



Dorothea was often described as an ambitious woman

© Alamy, Getty



Titian captures Isabella as a regal and composed holy Roman empress

ISABELLA OF PORTUGAL, HOLY ROMAN EMPRESS

A fiscally aware woman

PORTUGAL, 1530 – 1539

Through her marriage to Charles V, Isabella of Portugal was queen consort of Spain and Germany and holy Roman empress. Though the union had been one of political necessity, Charles fell in love at first sight with his intended bride and theirs became a love match, albeit not one without its challenges.

Whenever Charles was away on his frequent campaigns, Isabella served as his regent. She proved herself to be an intelligent and independent ruler, who wasn't content with simply taking the line politicians attempted to sell her. The empress had a keen eye for finances and kept the empire's coffers full despite increasingly expensive military manoeuvres. Though she died aged just 35, in the short years that she was a consort and regent, she steered the sprawling empire through economic and political waters that would have capsized many.

ELIZABETH OF YORK, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

The quiet consort

ENGLAND, 1486 – 1503

Marriage to Elizabeth of York helped secure Henry VII's claim to the throne

As the daughter of Elizabeth Woodville and King Edward IV as well as sister to the tragic "Princes in the Tower", Elizabeth of York certainly knew a thing or two when it came to the subject of difficult families. She married Henry VII shortly after his triumph at the Battle of Bosworth Field (1485), the union with the heiress of the House of York solidifying his claim to the royal throne.

Despite that – or maybe because of that – Henry was determined to be seen as his own man and offered his wife no share of power. However, the couple still became one another's champions and Elizabeth offered her husband an enormous amount of moral and personal support throughout his reign. Following her death in 1503 at the age of 37, Henry mourned her memory every year by holding a requiem mass and having 100 candles lit in honour of his late wife and most passionate supporter.

MUMTAZ MAHAL, EMPRESS CONSORT OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The Taj Mahal's inspiration

MUGHAL EMPIRE, 1628 – 1631

Mumtaz Mahal was her husband's greatest champion, and he built the Taj Mahal in her memory

Mumtaz Mahal was the second wife of Shah Jahan, and the couple adored one another. She was his most trusted confidante and wife for 19 years, three of those as empress. Shah Jahan consulted with her on every aspect of his reign and listened to her wise counsel, rewarding her for her wisdom with the imperial seal.

Following the death of his adored wife, the grief-stricken Shah became a recluse. For 12 months he mourned Mumtaz Mahal in seclusion, eventually emerging as a shadow of the man he had been. He had the Taj Mahal built in honour of his late wife and, when Shah Jahan died, his son had him laid to rest there too, forever at the side of the woman he loved.

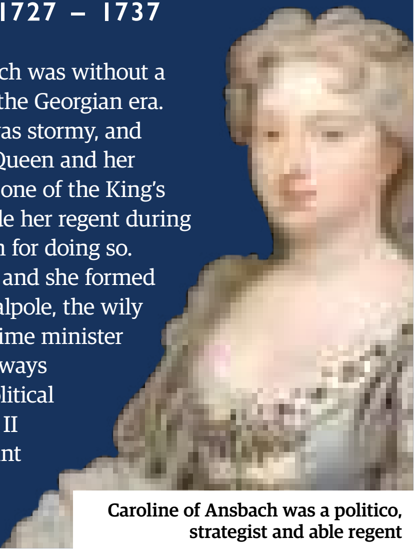
CAROLINE OF ANSBACH, QUEEN OF GREAT BRITAIN

Feuding mother and political regent

GREAT BRITAIN, 1727 – 1737

As the wife of George II, Caroline of Ansbach was without a doubt the most politically savvy queen of the Georgian era. Her relationship with her son, Frederick, was stormy, and things could be tumultuous between the Queen and her husband too. Despite their battles she was one of the King's most trusted advisors at court, and he made her regent during his trips overseas, incurring his son's wrath for doing so.

Caroline was infamous for her cronyism and she formed a mutually beneficial bond with Robert Walpole, the wily politician who became the first de facto prime minister of Great Britain. Though Caroline wasn't always popular with her subjects thanks to her political sway and love of courting factions, George II listened to her judgment on many important matters. When she died, he swore off ever marrying again.



Caroline of Ansbach was a politico, strategist and able regent

QUEEN ELIZABETH, THE QUEEN MOTHER

A royal matriarch

THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1936 – 1952

The Queen Mother was the matriarch of her family through changing and sometimes turbulent years

Few royals can claim to have enjoyed the popularity of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. As wife to George VI, she stood firm at her husband's side when his brother abdicated the throne and helped him deal with the debilitating stammer that blighted his confidence. Ironically, considering that she turned down two proposals from the future king, theirs was a true love match.

Though the Queen Mother was never considered a political consort, her relationship with her husband meant that she became his confidante and sounding board, a role that she later came to occupy for her daughter, Elizabeth II. From a beacon of the wartime home front to her role as a solid rock amid the maelstrom of royal upheaval, she was a symbol of monarchy that remained constant for nearly 70 years of public life.

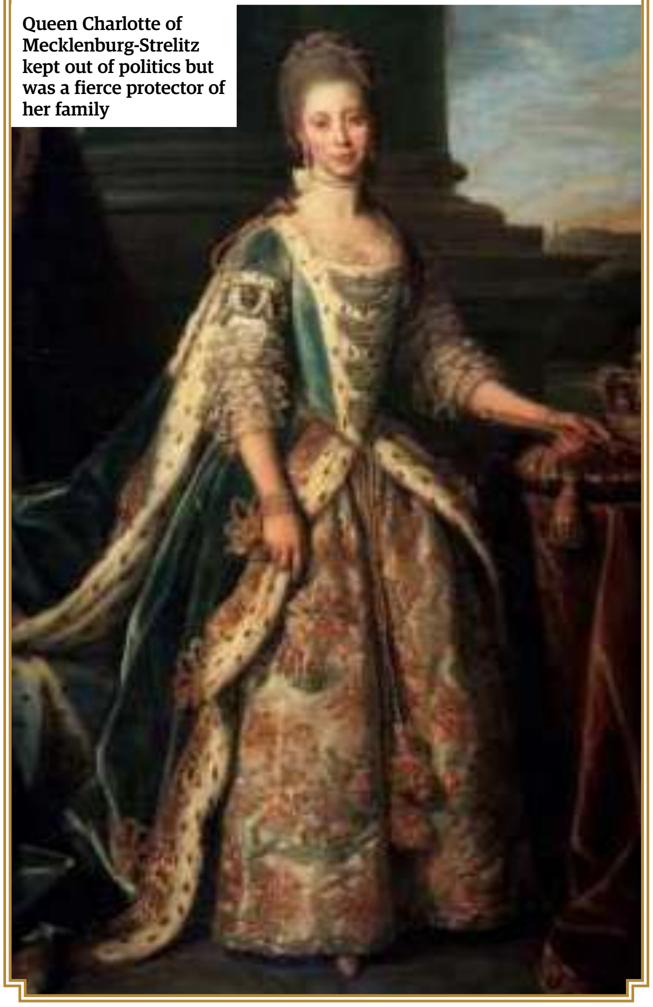
CHARLOTTE OF MECKLENBURG-STRELITZ

Queen of hearth and home

GREAT BRITAIN, 1761 – 1818

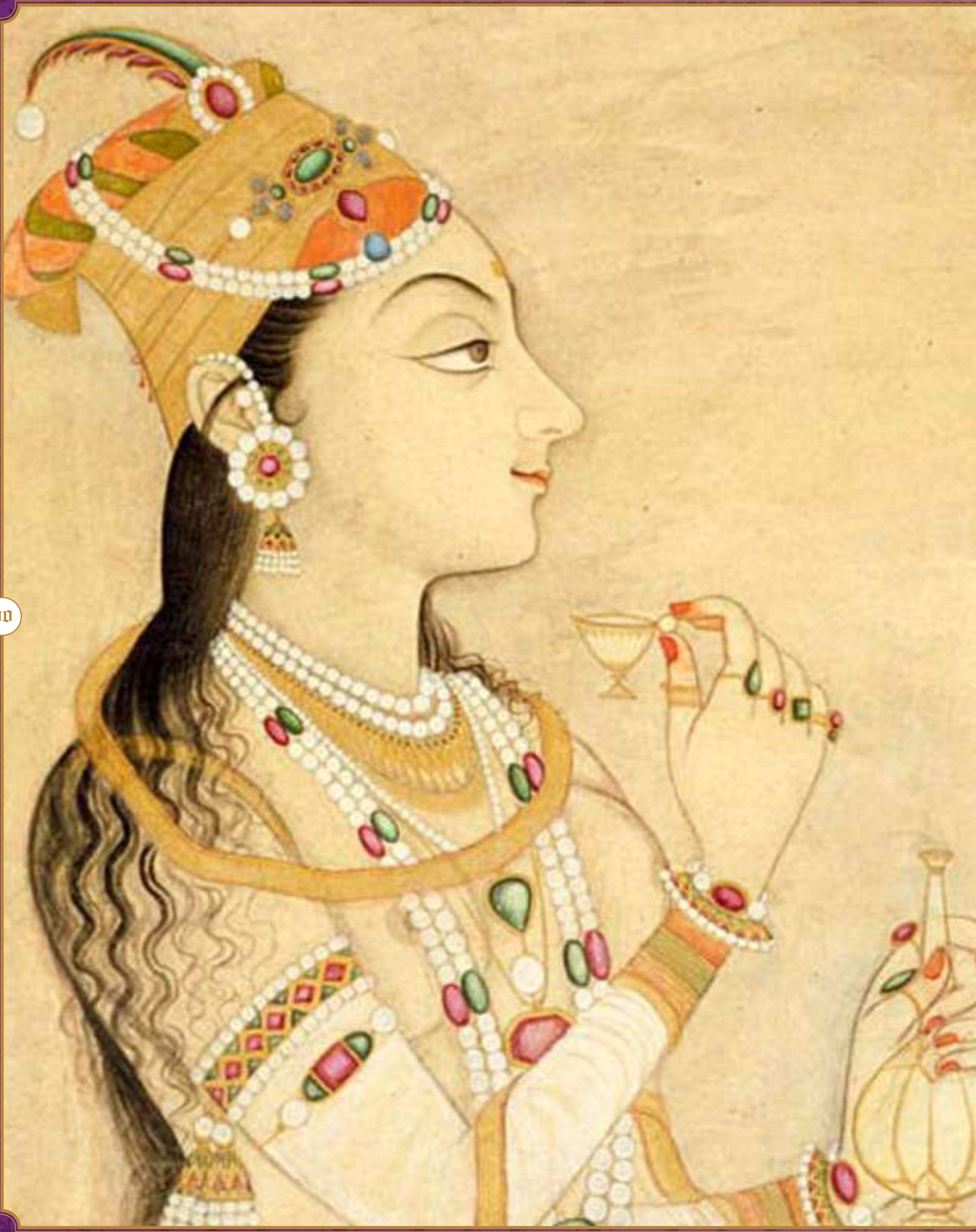
Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz was an inexperienced teenager when she arrived in England to be married to George III, and theirs was a love match untroubled by mistresses or romantic intrigues. The King and Queen established a court at which piety and tradition ruled all, while at home they and their 15 children eschewed largesse in favour of a quiet family life. Tragically, their idyll was shattered by the King's struggles with mental illness and the couple's ongoing battles with their eldest son, George, Prince of Wales.

As the King succumbed to his doctors and George became prince regent, Queen Charlotte established herself as her husband's greatest protector. She kept her promise to him never to become involved in politics and instead concentrated on caring for his legacy and reputation, while indulging her own tireless philanthropic pursuits.



Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz kept out of politics but was a fierce protector of her family

© Alamy, Getty



1620 – 1627

EMPRESS NUR JAHAN

When she married the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, Nur Jahan became the real power behind his throne

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

Born as Mehr-un-Nissa in 1577 in Kandahar, Nur Jahan became one of the most powerful empresses history has ever seen. Though she was born into a noble family, Nur Jahan's earliest days were anything but privileged, and by the time of her birth, her family's power and wealth had dwindled away. Nur Jahan herself was born shortly after her poverty-stricken family arrived in Kandahar following an arduous and dangerous trip, but her arrival seemed to signal a change in their fortune.

Soon after their new daughter came along, her family joined the caravan of a noble who secured her father a position in the Mughal Empire, where he swiftly rose through the ranks of state until he was one of the Emperor's most trusted officials. Though her start in life had been humble, Nur Jahan was raised at the heart of a comfortable and wealthy family. Intelligent, inquisitive and self-possessed, she enjoyed a comprehensive education and grew into a confident woman.

At the age of 17, Nur Jahan married Sher Afgan Khan, a Persian who had distinguished himself in the military service of Kandahar Their marriage was arranged by the Emperor as a reward to Sher Afgan for his service, and Nur Jahan bore her husband one child. Thirteen years after their marriage, the once celebrated Sher Afgan Khan was accused of being a traitor and was killed during a struggle when representatives of the Emperor tried to apprehend him. With his wife and daughter alone in the world, they had no choice but to accept an invitation from Emperor Jahangir to join his court, where they could be guaranteed protection from enemies of Nur Jahan's late husband.

Upon her arrival at Jahangir's court, Nur Jahan was given the role of lady-in-waiting to Dowager Empress Ruqaiya Sultan Begum, the Emperor's stepmother. For Nur Jahan, serving Ruqaiya Sultan Begum proved to be the ideal position. Since Nur Jahan's father was in the service of the Emperor, her new position allowed her to see her parents and she was able to make a life for herself at the palace, where her relationship with Ruqaiya Sultan Begum blossomed into friendship. Nur Jahan soon became her favourite amongst her ladies.

> Nur Jahan was the first woman to hold the position of co-sovereign of the Mughal Empire

Though stories later emerged that claimed Jahangir had engineered the murder of Sher Afgan ▶

Khan so he could get his hands of Nur Jahan, the Emperor didn't actually meet her until 1611, when they were both celebrating the festival of Nowruz. Nur Jahan and the Emperor crossed paths at the palace's bazaar and Jahangir was instantly smitten. He proposed to his stepmother's favourite almost immediately after meeting her and the couple were married on 25 May 1611. Nur Jahan was eight years her new husband's junior; she was also his 20th and last wife.

If Jahangir had fallen in love with Nur Jahan at first sight, it was an affection that lasted. He bestowed upon her the title Nur Mahal, meaning Light of the World, when they married and five years later, she finally became known as *Nur Jahan*: Light of the World. Though the exact number of the couple's children - if indeed there were any at all - is difficult to ascertain from the conflicting records, one thing that is not in doubt is the power that the new empress was able to wield. Nur Jahan's intelligence was complemented by her common sense, whilst her husband's reliance on opium and drink meant that there was often a vacuum where his leadership should be. In Nur Jahan, he found the ideal person to fill it.

Jahangir awarded Nur Jahan with the imperial seal, the highest symbol of power that was in his gift to give. This wasn't merely a symbolic gesture, it confirmed that she wielded power over all affairs. Her involvement and consent were needed to enshrine any decision in law and, as her husband languished, more often than not it was she who made decisions on behalf of the Emperor. She wielded domestic power too, as Jahangir entrusted her with the upbringing of his grandson, Prince Shah Shuja, whom she adopted. Shah Shuja was widely regarded as Jahangir's favourite, the significance of the decision regarding his upbringing could not be missed.

Though the succession of the Emperor's family could not be influenced by Nur Jahan, no matter how politically shrewd she was, she could certainly ensure that she took care of her own in other ways. With her influence over her husband absolute and his trust in her unshakable, she was able to ensure that those closest to her benefitted from her marriage. Nur Jahan's father's career had been a turbulent one, but when his daughter married Jahangir, he was set for life. She suggested to Jahangir that her father be appointed prime minister and charges of embezzlement that had dogged him were struck off. Likewise, other members of her family found themselves appointed to high office in the Emperor's inner circle and wherever there had been suspicions or rumours attached to them, those too were suddenly nowhere to be seen. In order to ensure she had fully consolidated her influence in the generations yet to come, Nur Jahan had one final ace to play. She arranged the marriage of Ladli, her only child with Sher Afgan Khan, to Shahryar, the youngest son of Emperor Jahangir.

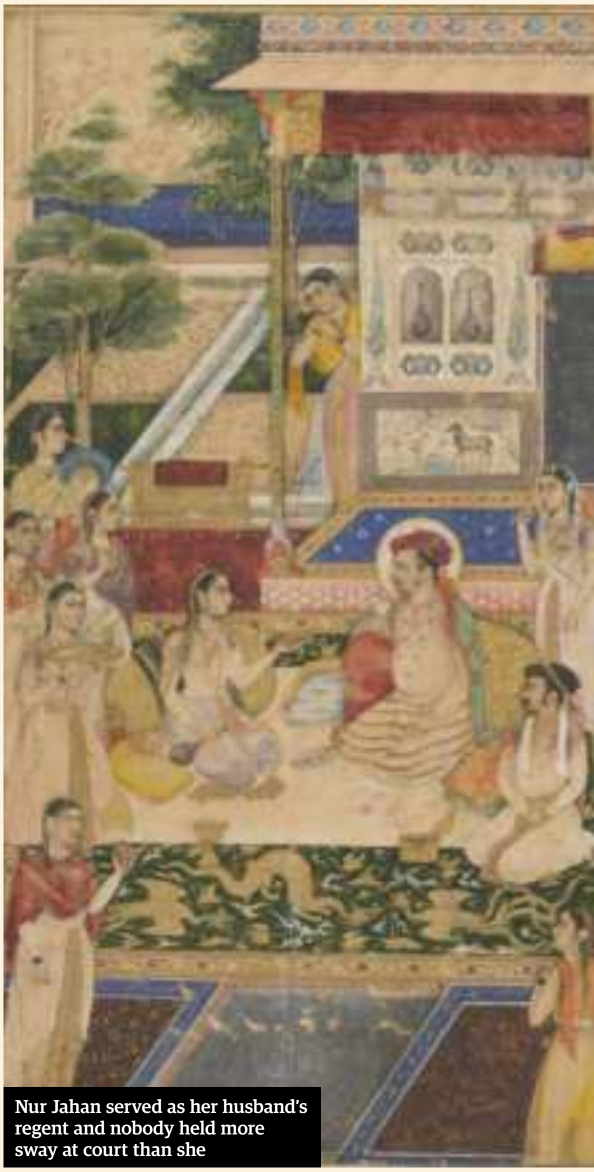
However, Nur Jahan had not actually set out to marry her daughter to her husband's youngest son, but to Khusrau Mirza, his eldest. The Emperor's health was poor and getting worse and Khusrau Mirza, was a favourite of the people, so the clear choice for his ambitious wife. However, he declined the proposal that Nur Jahan put to him, as he wished to be loyal to his chief wife. Nur Jahan then attempted to marry her daughter to yet another son, Khurram Mirza, who also turned her down due to his personal suspicions about the motivation for her decision. Finally she made the offer to Jahangir's youngest son, Shahryar Mirza, who accepted 16-year-old Ladli as his bride and married her in 1627. Nur Jahan's efforts at personal empire building didn't go unnoticed or unremarked by her critics, who saw her acts as potentially destabilising. Yet the marriage achieved precisely what Nur Jahan had wanted, at least for a little while. Following the death of Emperor Jahangir, Shahryar did indeed succeed to the throne, where he reigned for less than three months before his brother ordered his execution.

Nur Jahan was the only Mughal empress to have her name issued on coins

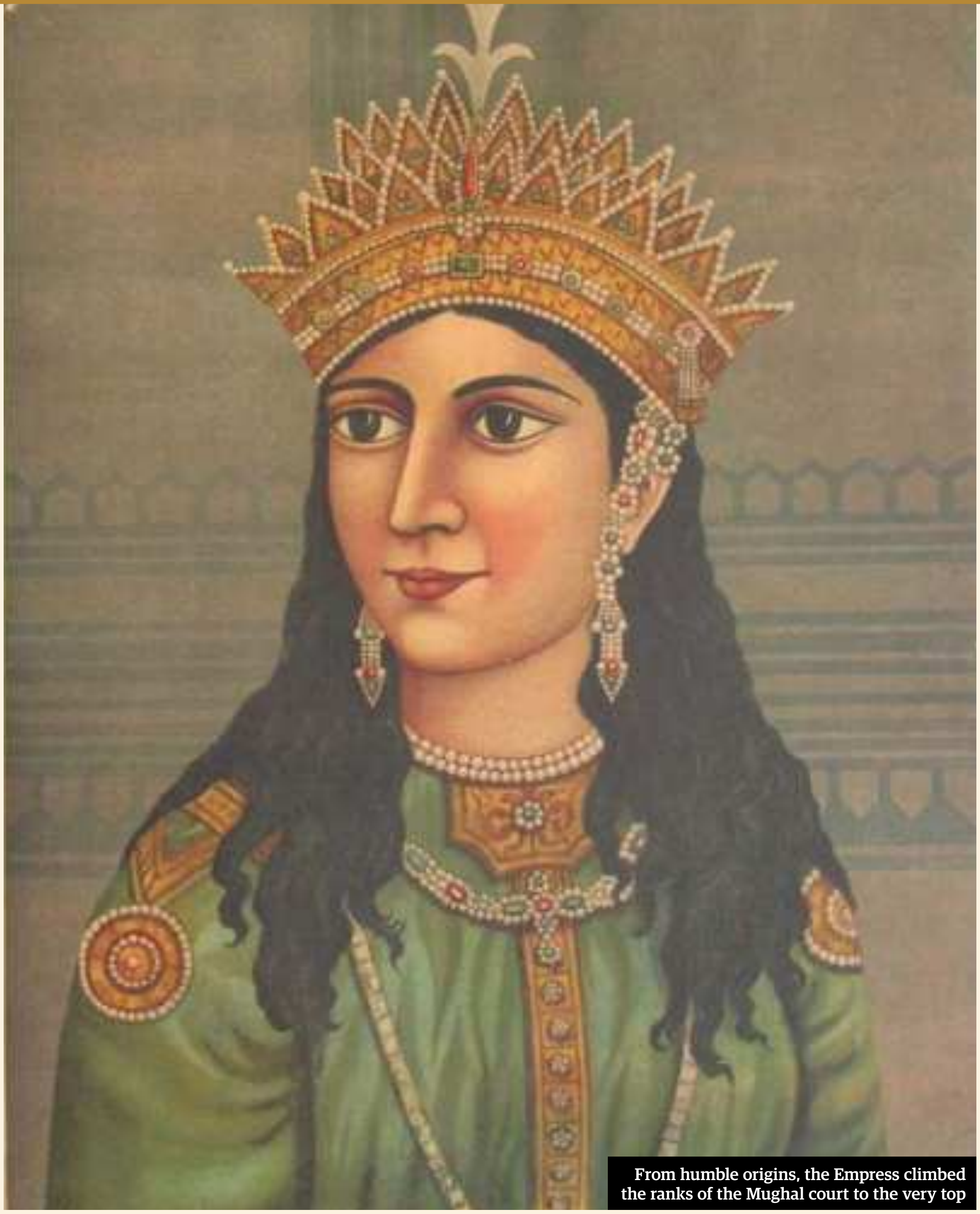
Nur Jahan was regarded as a fierce and bold empress, a reputation that was enhanced by her love of hunting tigers and her fearlessness when she spotted her prey. Her courage and willingness to face any foe without flinching impressed Jahangir, and he made her his regent whenever he was otherwise engaged. It seemed as though Nur Jahan was unassailable and she put down revolts that threatened the Empire, as well as family feuds that threatened the future. Yet when her husband was taken prisoner by rebels in 1626, she proved that she was as practical when it came to action as she was when it came to diplomacy.

Jahangir's captivity was orchestrated by rebel leader Mahabat Khan, who had planned to orchestrate a coup against the Emperor. Nur Jahan hit back hard, and rode into battle on a war elephant to secure his release. Yet she had underestimated her foe, and found her forces outnumbered and her steed brought down. Nur Jahan surrendered and was placed in captivity alongside the Emperor, but Mahabat Khan had anticipated her cool head and intelligence. Even when imprisoned, Nur Jahan proved herself a born strategist and she marshalled her supporters and led both herself and her husband to safety. Though the couple were rescued, Jahangir died soon afterwards on 28 October 1627. Crucially, he had failed to name a successor amongst his sons before he did.

"She proved that she was as practical when it came to action as she was when it came to diplomacy"


Nur Jahan served as her husband's regent and nobody held more sway at court than she

Jahangir's death led to a fierce war of succession among his sons, which Nur Jahan obviously did her best to influence. However, when Shahryar was defeated, Nur Jahan was placed under house arrest with her daughter and granddaughter. She remained in captivity until her death in 1645, and was laid to rest in the tomb that she had designed herself. To the end, she was in control of her legacy and today she is celebrated as one of the most powerful and influential empresses the Mughal Empire ever saw.



From humble origins, the Empress climbed the ranks of the Mughal court to the very top

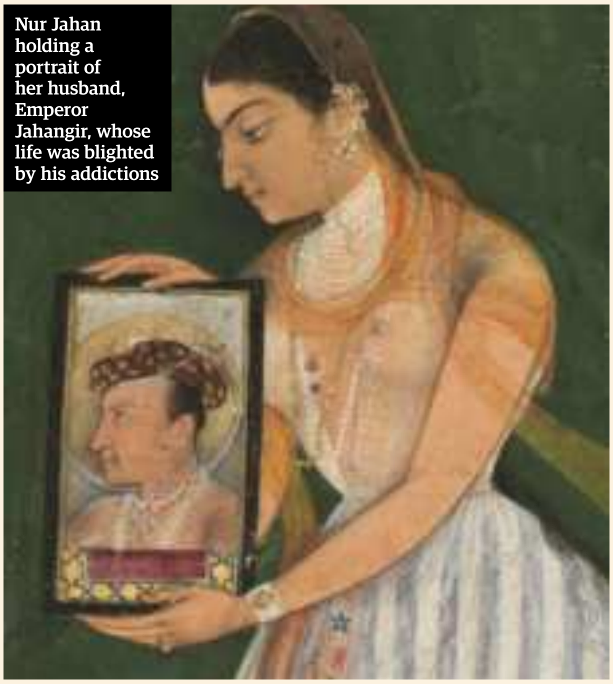
Nur Jahan is buried alongside her daughter, Ladli Begum

Nur Jahan took the arts as seriously as she took political power

Nur Jahan's patronage of the arts was celebrated and she knew that one of the best ways to show off her Empire's wealth was to make it a centre for everything from architecture to textiles and beyond.

The reign of Nur Jahan saw her embark on a bold programme of architecture that completely transformed the face of the Mughal Empire. Just as she was celebrated for her eye for fashion and wore the most sumptuous textiles to showcase all that her kingdom could offer, so too did the impressive buildings and flourishing pleasure gardens show off the money and taste that the Empire was able to command.

Nur Jahan's own tomb in Lahore was built to her personal specification. Like everything else she patronised, the striking tomb was noted for its good taste and grandeur. Sadly, it was plundered during the 19th century.



Nur Jahan holding a portrait of her husband, Emperor Jahangir, whose life was blighted by his addictions

Nur Jahan's vision resulted in the transformation of architecture in the Mughal Empire

© Alamy, Wikimedia Commons

1632 - 1654

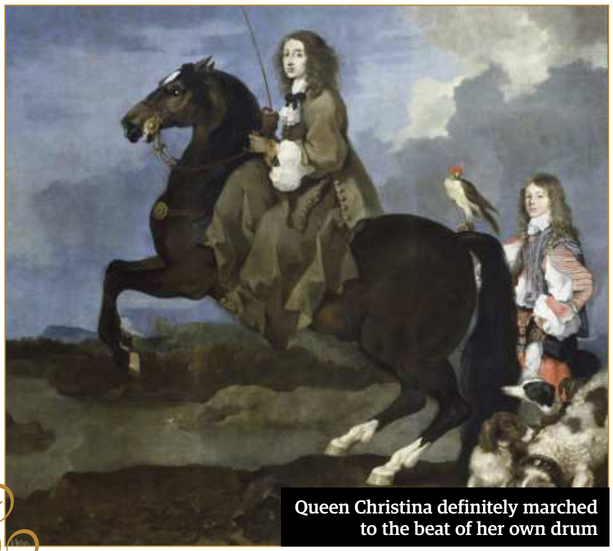
CHRISTINA, QUEEN OF SWEDEN

Once described by the Pope as "a woman without shame", Christina, Queen of Sweden, trod her own path

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

When Christina was born in 1626, her mother, Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg, greeted the birth of a daughter with dismay. She wanted to give her husband, Gustav II Adolf of Sweden a male heir, and a little girl simply didn't fit the bill. Gustav, however, accepted Christina as his heir; she would be raised to rule.

Christina's father died when she was just six, and until the little girl came of age, the Swedish chancellor, Oxenstierna, would act as regent. When she did reach the age of majority, Christina was anything but the traditional royal woman. She had enjoyed an extensive education and adored traditionally masculine pursuits, including hunting, fencing, alchemy and philosophy. Crucially for a single woman of royal birth, she made it clear that she wouldn't marry under any circumstances, nor would she produce an heir to succeed her.



Queen Christina definitely marched to the beat of her own drum

In 1645, just a year after Christina came of age, she and Oxenstierna butted heads on the matter of the Thirty Years' War. Oxenstierna wanted to continue the work of her father and keep Sweden embroiled in conflict on the side of German Protestants, but Christina wanted peace. Oxenstierna and Christina sent opposing delegates to the Peace Congress, where Christina's man claimed the victory and the Peace of Westphalia ended the conflict. It was perhaps her most significant triumph.

> When Christina embarked on her journey to Rome, she cut her hair and changed into male attire

Christina nursed a passion for the arts. She was desperate to create a "Venice of the North" and filled her court with scholars and scientists. Among them were Catholic scholars with whom Christina engaged in energetic and impassioned debates until, in 1652, she decided that she wanted to convert to Catholicism. This flew in the face of everything her father had fought for in the Thirty Years' War, and it did little to improve her popularity in Sweden – especially because, as queen regnant, she was the head of the Swedish Lutheran Church. Already facing criticism for her apparent disinterest in anything other than culture and for increasing the number of nobles, as well as presiding over the execution of a critic of her reign, Christina's desire to convert was the final straw.

She abdicated in a ceremony held at Uppsala Castle in June 1654, removing her own crown. Christina had wished to abdicate for some time and in preparation, had secretly sent her art collection and other valuables to Antwerp in 1653.

The former queen was succeeded by her first cousin, King Charles X Gustav, and she went into exile in Rome. That December, Christina finally converted to Catholicism and she passed the majority of her remaining days in Rome.

> *"She made it clear that she wouldn't marry under any circumstances"*

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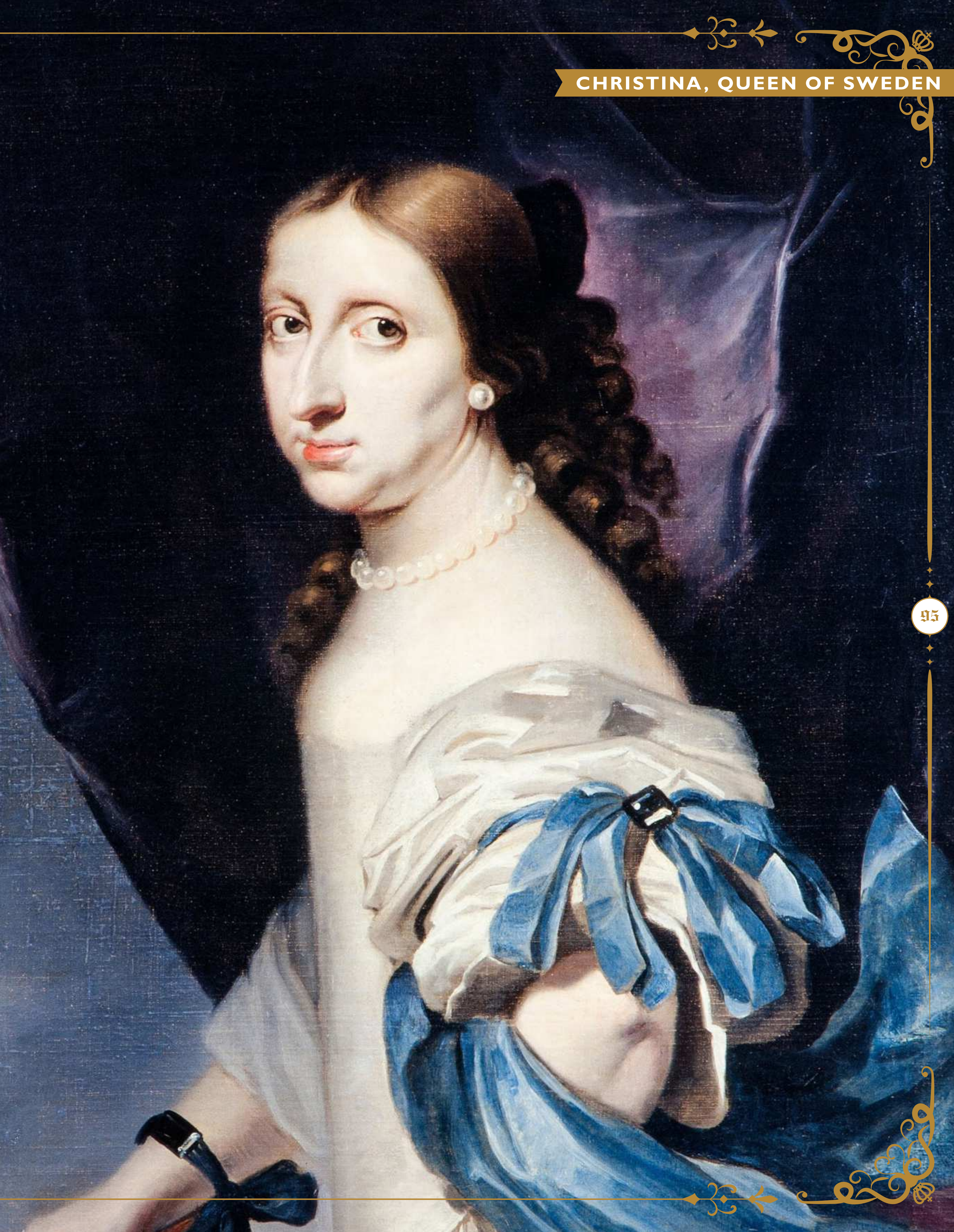
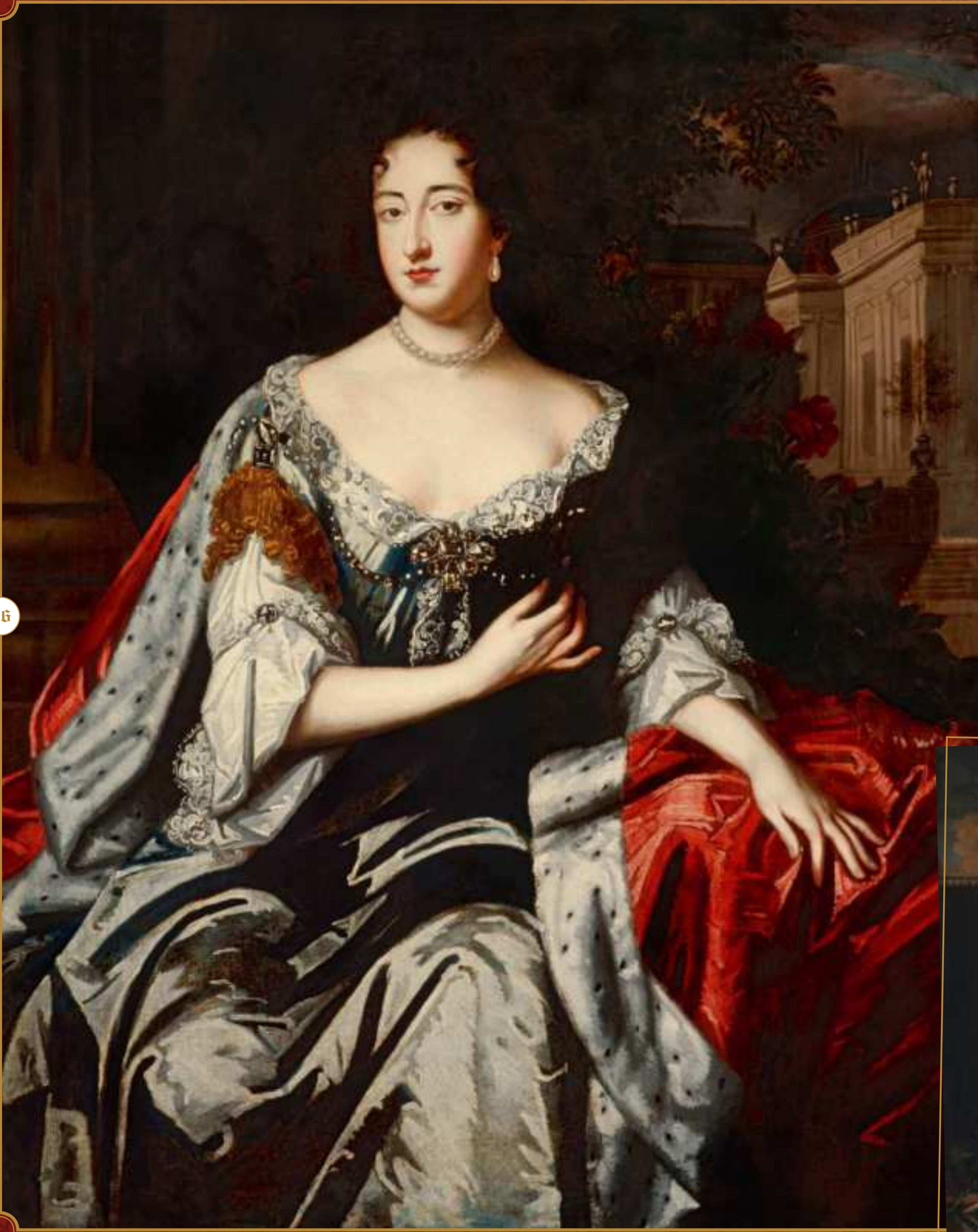




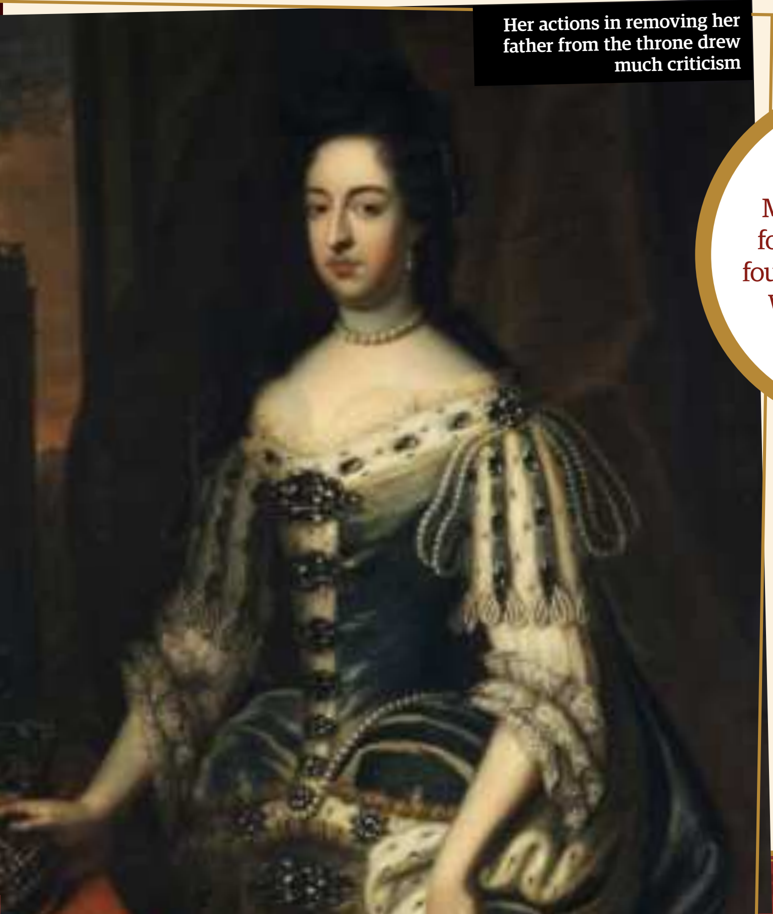
1689 – 1694

MARY II, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

When Mary II came to the English throne, she changed the line of succession forever

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

Mary was the daughter of James II of England and her road to the throne was paved with clashes of religion. When she was just a little girl her father converted to Catholicism, a decision that would both spell the end of his reign and make him the last Catholic monarch of Britain. He raised his son and heir to be Catholic too, though his daughters, Mary and Anne, were raised as Protestants.


Her actions in removing her father from the throne drew much criticism

In 1677 Mary married her cousin, William III of Orange, and moved to the Netherlands, Though the marriage was a happy one, it was childless, and Mary suffered at least one miscarriage that appears to have impaired her ability to carry a child and, crucially, provide an heir.

In 1688, a group of seven Protestant nobles wrote to William and Mary and invited them to come to England and depose the King, who was attempting to establish a Catholic line of succession. Mary was torn by loyalty to her father and her husband, who supported the coup, but eventually she came down on William's side, and joined him in returning to England. The Glorious Revolution propelled William and Mary onto the throne and exiled Mary's father and brother to France. The couple were crowned in 1689 and that same year the Bill of Rights enshrined their claim to the throne.

Mary may have wanted to take a back seat, but her husband was frequently away on campaigns and Mary ruled in his absence. Though she abstained from political meddling, she was by no means a pushover and proved to be a firm and sensible ruler. Her interests lay within issues of faith and she was responsible for making decisions on matters of ecclesiastical patronage, even if it meant disagreeing with William in doing so. Though her enemies sought to portray her as a disloyal daughter who was in thrall to her husband, she was anything but. Her short reign ended with her death at the age of 32, but Mary II was a more than capable ruler in the scant period she enjoyed on the throne.

Mary had a passion for learning and she founded the College of William and Mary in Virginia

> *"Though she abstained from political meddling, she was not a pushover"*

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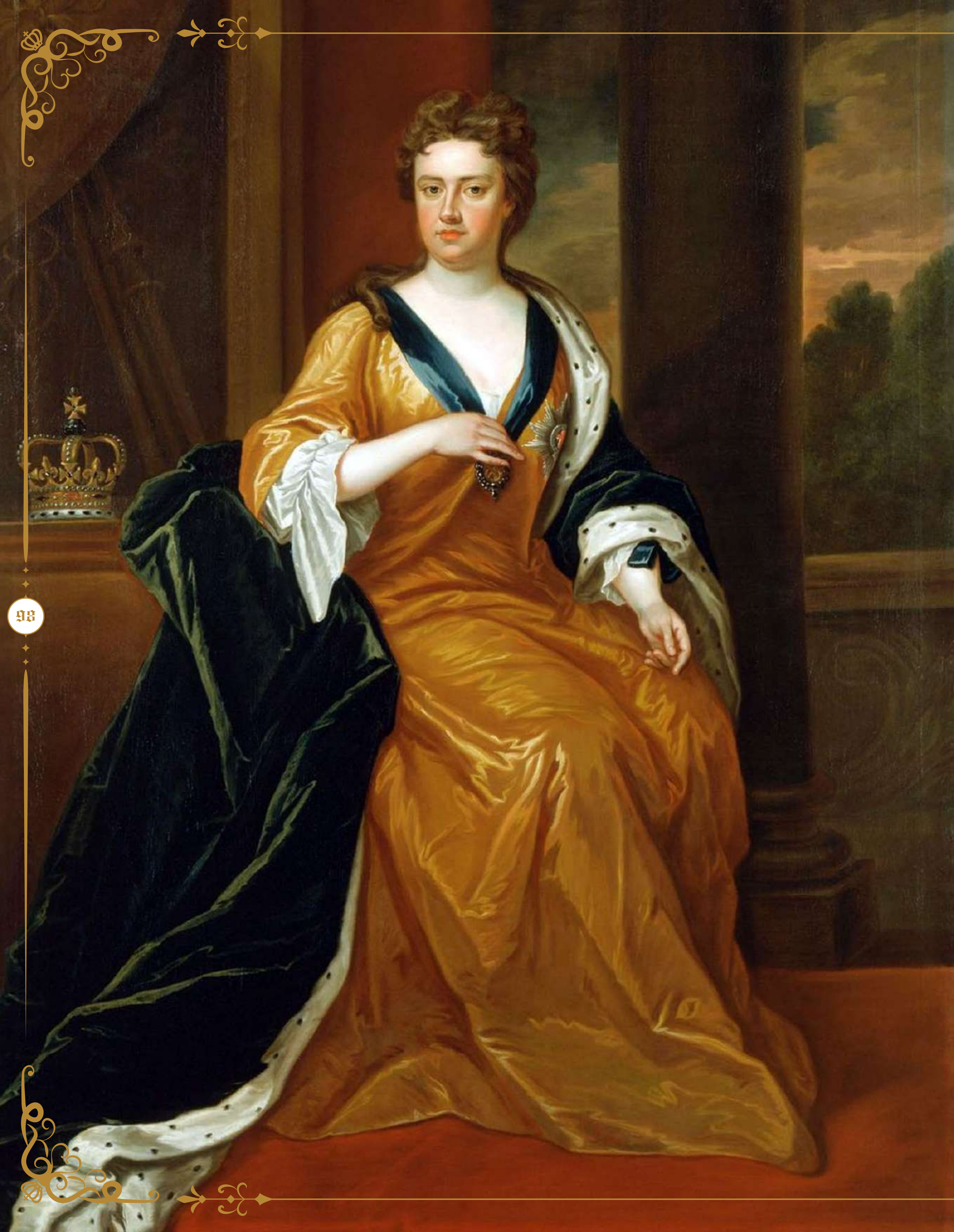
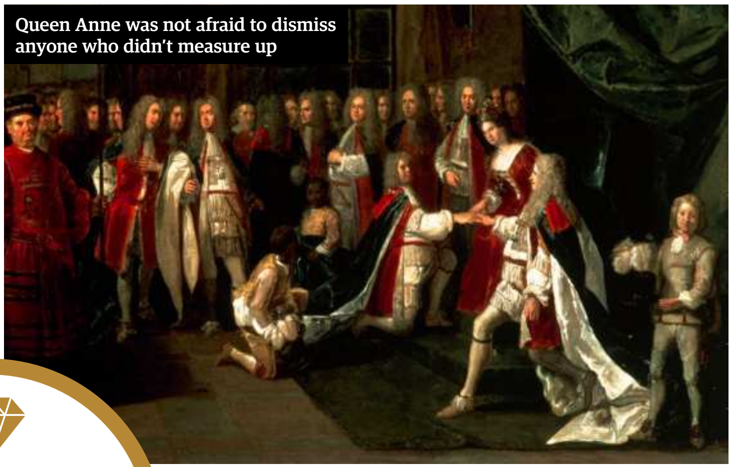


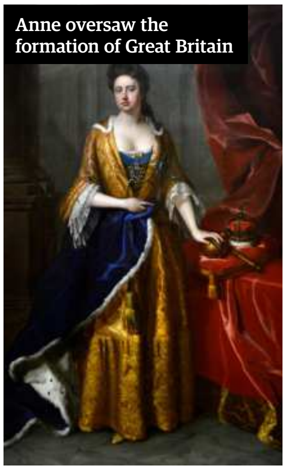
1702 – 1714

ANNE, QUEEN OF GREAT BRITAIN

Though her health was weak, Queen Anne proved herself a monarch to be reckoned with

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON


Queen Anne was not afraid to dismiss anyone who didn't measure up


Anne oversaw the formation of Great Britain

The Glorious Revolution changed the line of succession in England forever. Queen Anne succeeded her late sister, Mary, and Mary's widower, William III, both of whom died without producing an heir.

Though Mary had hoped to let her husband do most of the ruling, Anne took a firm grip on the reins of power. She promoted those who shared her Anglican faith, creating a Tory stronghold at the heart of government as she weeded out her Whig opponents. To become a favourite of Anne was the key to achieving office, and as a result of infighting many of her personal and professional relationships soured, most famously that with her close friend Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough.

Anne died without any surviving heirs and so she was the last monarch of the House of Stuart

Queen Anne presided over the Acts of Union, which formed the kingdom of Great Britain, and the War of Spanish Succession that led her into direct conflict with members of her political administration. Anne didn't suffer fools gladly, and sometimes it seemed to her as though she was surrounded by them. Her opponents had very definite opinions on how a woman should behave and in their eyes, she overstepped the mark too often. Yet she was a queen, and a queen who was determined to rule.

Anne's beloved husband, Prince George of Denmark, died in 1708. Though she had endured 17 distressing pregnancies, many of these ended in stillbirth or miscarriage, and none of the couple's children reached adulthood. These tragedies left their mark on Anne in all sorts of ways, exhausting her body and spirit. She died at the age of 49 and in the centuries that followed, was disparaged by those who sought to write the history of a complex woman. Reduced to an ignorant figure with poor judgment and even worse taste in favourites, few reflected on the fact that Anne had been forced time and again to butt heads with men who believed they knew better. Yet she presided over a stable and prosperous kingdom and one that, for all its conflicts, never faced the crises that those who came before and after would endure.

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1740 – 1780

EMPRESS MARIA THERESA

Empress Maria Theresa reigned for four decades, and never ceded power to a man despite expectations

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

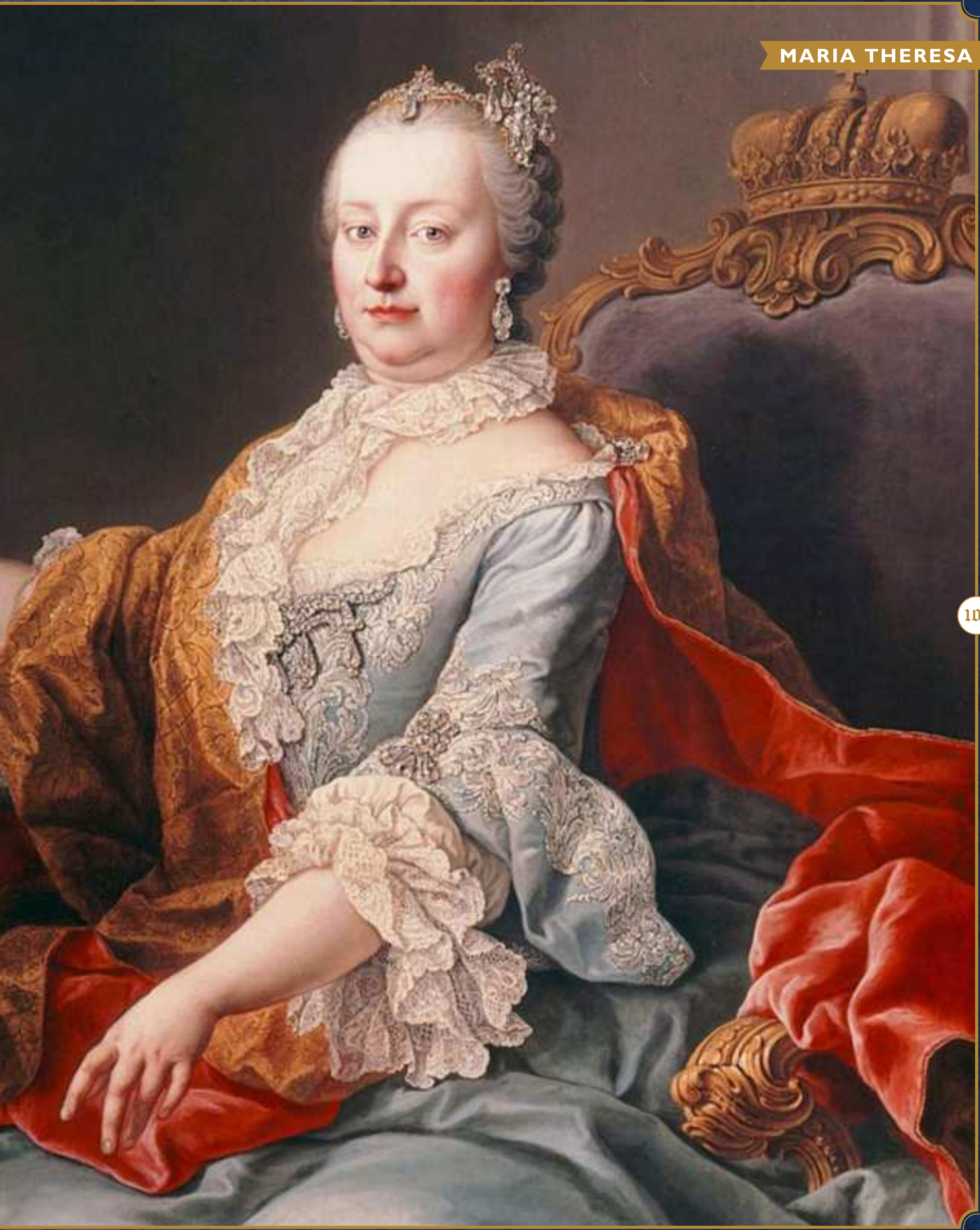
Maria Theresa was the only woman to rule the Habsburg dominions in her own right in the long and storied history of the dynasty. Thanks to her marriage to Francis I she was holy Roman empress too, but she never ceded her ancestral lands to her husband, and continued to rule while she saw off challenges from across the continent.

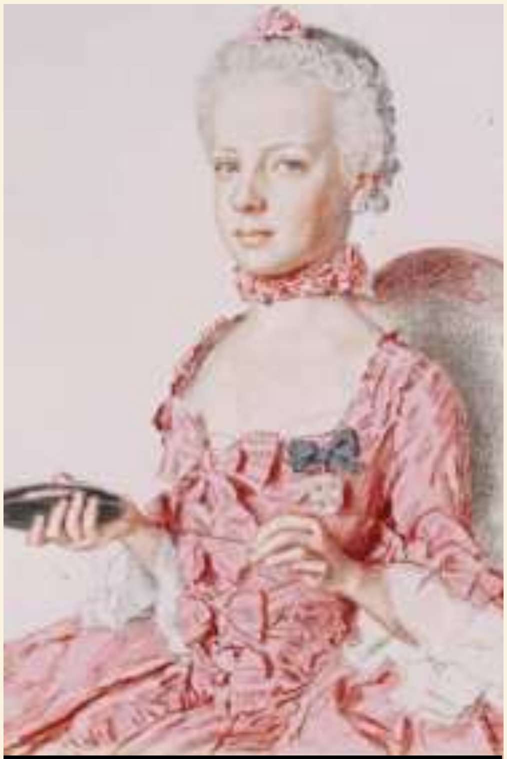
When Maria Theresa was born in 1717, the fact that she was a girl came as an enormous disappointment to her mother and father, Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI and Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Their only son and heir had died the year previously and the couple had been hoping for another boy. Despite his disappointment, Charles had already secured his line of succession with the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713, which ensured that his territories could be inherited by his daughter, should he fail to produce a son. Although he had succeeded to the throne after his older brother, the late Emperor Joseph I, died without having produced any living son, the Pragmatic Sanction ignored Joseph's own daughters and pushed Charles's girl to the front of the line. In doing so, it directly contradicted the Mutual Pact of Succession, which both brothers had signed, and which gave precedence to the daughters of Joseph. In the years to come, it would cause Maria Theresa considerable challenges.

Despite the fact that she was in line for the throne, much of Maria Theresa's formal education was lacking. Though she experienced a comprehensive education in the skills expected of a royal wife, little effort was made to prepare her to take the reins of state. In preparation for her forthcoming role, Charles took his daughter to council meetings from her early teens, but he never bothered to explain what she was seeing, nor to educate her in any matters of politics of state affairs. Ironically, while he put a huge amount of energy into securing the succession of his daughter, he made precious little effort when it came to any form of practical preparation.

Though Charles neglected Maria Theresa's education, he certainly didn't take the matter of her marriage lightly. After a few false starts, Charles finally settled on a betrothal between his daughter and Francis Stephen, the son of the Duke of Lorraine. Francis Stephen came to live at the Hapsburg court a decade before the eventual wedding, leaving only when he succeeded as duke of Lorraine in 1729. By the time he married Maria Theresa in 1736, the couple were in love.

The year after their marriage, Francis Stephen ceded Lorraine and he and Maria Theresa became grand duke and duchess of Tuscany. Amid the celebrations, nobody was more happy than Maria Theresa, who was her husband's champion from the off. Yet her support was always tempered by jealousy; with a husband who was unfaithful, their marriage was not without its problems. ▶





Marie Antoinette, archduchess of Austria, pictured as a young girl

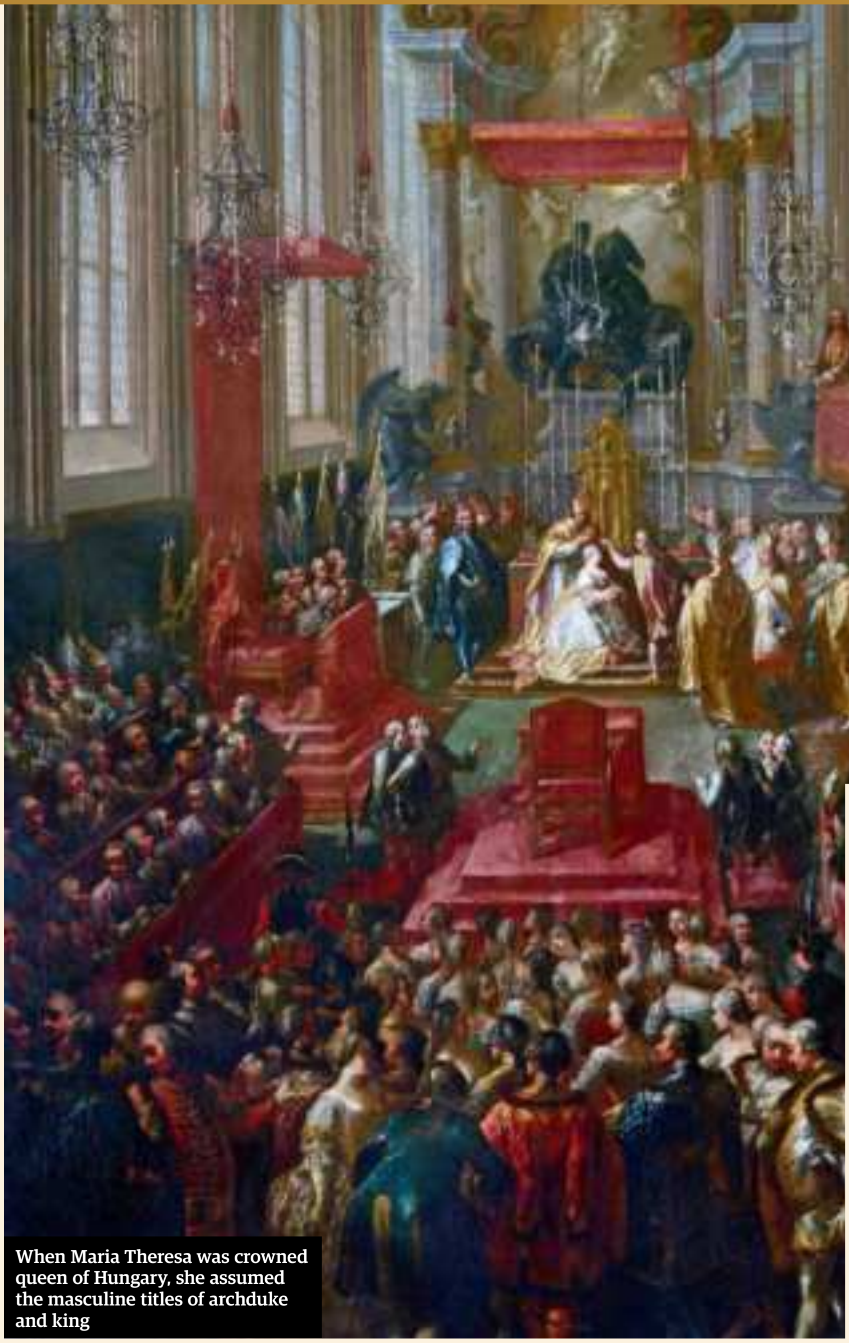
THE EMPRESS AND THE QUEEN

Amongst Marie Theresa's 16 children was one who has become infamous: Queen Marie Antoinette

Three of Maria Theresa's 16 children survived infancy, and no matter how old they were, she continued to be a loving but dominant mother. Amongst those children was Maria Antonia who, as the youngest daughter, had never figured particularly greatly in her mother's life until the Bourbon court showed an interest in her as a possible bride for Dauphin Louis.

Maria Antonia scarcely had an education, but Maria Theresa swung into action. She trained her in the ins and outs of court etiquette, oversaw a wardrobe and beauty makeover and even signed off on some agonising dental work – administered without anaesthetic.

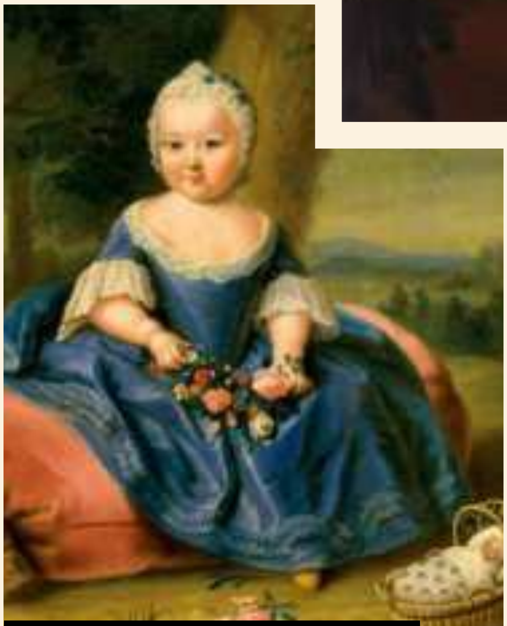
Once Maria Antonia had married and become Marie Antoinette, her mother maintained a constant presence in her life even though the young bride was now living in France. Maria Theresa wrote to her every other week, detailing her daughter's wrongdoings and pressuring her to have a child, to satisfy her own dynastic and familial ambitions.



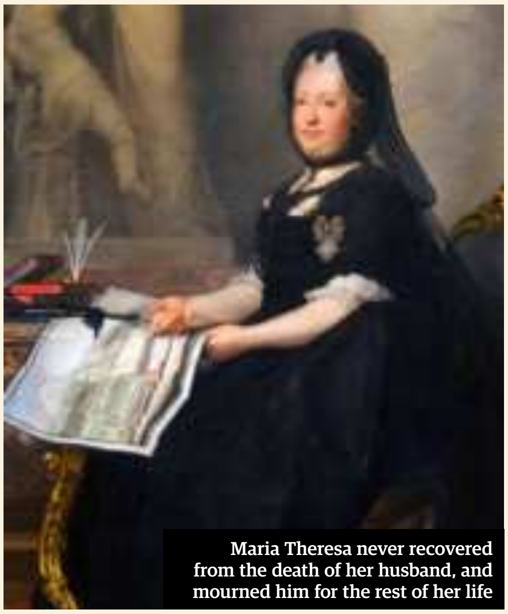
When Maria Theresa was crowned queen of Hungary, she assumed the masculine titles of archduke and king

When Charles VI died in 1740, Maria Theresa inherited the sprawling Hapsburg dominions, as well as coffers that had been emptied by war and a vastly depleted army. With little preparation in how to govern, she was dependent on her father's ministers, not all of whom were competent or loyal. By now in her early thirties, Maria Theresa's lack of awareness of the political situation on the continent led her to dismiss any possibility that her new realm could be under threat from enemies. Instead, she focused on shoring up her power; key to that was the position of her husband.

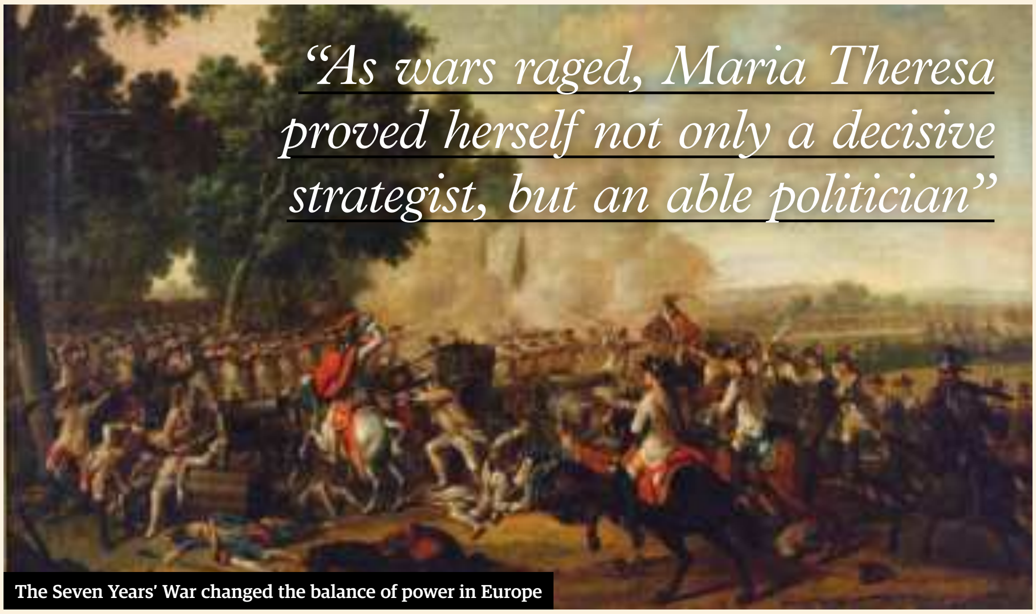
Since a woman couldn't be elected holy Roman empress, Maria Theresa reigned as queen of Hungary and archduchess of Austria, despite having been given the masculine titles of king and archduke upon her succession. She was, however, determined to secure the position of holy Roman emperor for Francis Stephen, which would give her the rank of holy Roman empress. Aware that he lacked the rank and territories to be considered as a candidate, she appointed him as her co-ruler to elevate him in status, but it was a promotion in



As a child, Maria Theresa wasn't prepared for the role she was destined to inherit

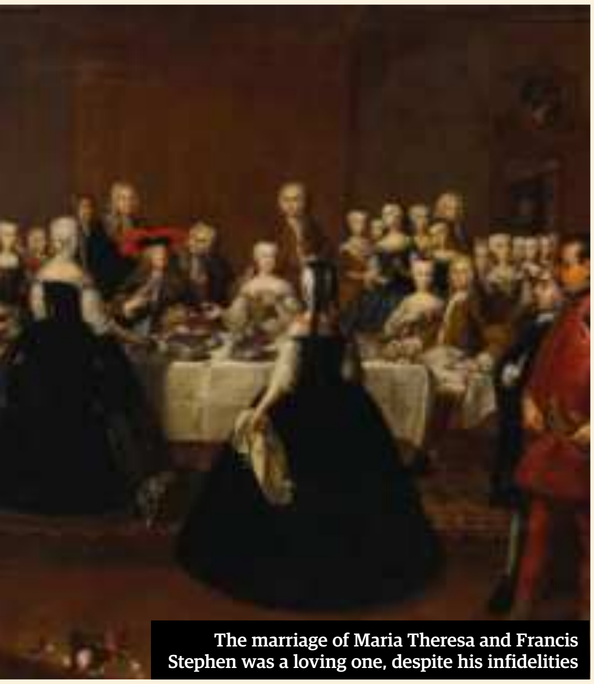


Maria Theresa never recovered from the death of her husband, and mourned him for the rest of her life



The Seven Years' War changed the balance of power in Europe

> *"As wars raged, Maria Theresa proved herself not only a decisive strategist, but an able politician"*



The marriage of Maria Theresa and Francis Stephen was a loving one, despite his infidelities

name only: Francis Stephen never enjoyed any real power and always deferred to his wife.

Maria Theresa soon learned that she had been wrong to expect loyalty from neighbouring lands as, one by one, those nations that had promised to recognise her succession reneged on the deal. On the one side were those who supported the claim of her disenfranchised cousin, the daughter of the late Emperor Joseph I, while on the other were the monarchs who were eager to grab whatever they could get. When Frederick the Great's forces marched into Silesia and he requested that Maria Theresa cede it, it was a decisive moment. With her husband eager to reach a compromise, Maria Theresa was determined to win a decisive victory instead. She went to war with Prussia, striking the first blows in a conflict that was to be engulfed by the War of the Austrian Succession.

Desperate for troops and with few signing up for the job, Maria Theresa donned the crown of St Stephen and appeared before the Hungarian Diet to appeal for military support. With France busy drawing up plans to partition her lands and scatter them across other sovereigns, this was without a doubt the most important moment in her reign to date, and it was met with derision. Yet as members of the Diet catcalled and heckled, Maria Theresa played her ace. She held up her baby son, Joseph, and wept as she told the Hungarians that the infant was depending on them to give him a future. This innate showmanship saved the day and the Diet pledged its support to the Queen.

With her position under intense threat, Marie Theresa was dealt a bitter blow when she lost Bohemia to Charles Albert, elector of Bavaria, who was elected holy Roman emperor soon afterwards. As war raged and territories changed hands back and forth, Maria Theresa kept one eye on the contested throne. When Charles Albert died in 1745, she finally saw her husband, Francis Stephen, elected as holy Roman emperor, with Maria Theresa finally becoming holy Roman empress. Despite his grand title though, the new Emperor Francis I would never wield true power, and nor did he wish to.

Despite this personal triumph, wars continued to rage and Maria Theresa proved herself not only a decisive strategist, but an able politician. She negotiated new diplomatic links with her traditional French enemies in order to take on their common foe of Prussia, and recognised when to concede and when to fight on. The Seven Years' War, however, did not go Austria's way. With Russia's support lost to her after the death of Empress Elizabeth, and her French allies torn between the war in Europe and conflicts in America and India, the Holy Roman Empire ultimately lacked the might to secure victory. When the Treaties of Paris and Hubertusburg ended hostilities, Prussia was now a power on a par with its Austrian neighbour. The balance of power in Europe had shifted forever.

Left smarting by the outcome of the war, Maria Theresa looked inwards for new projects. She turned her focus to the domestic, ruling as a conservative even as she introduced reforms to the army and restructured the complex machinery of her state administration. During her reign, Austria was able to refill its ailing coffers despite the many years of war and saw its economy flourish. After a smallpox epidemic claimed the lives of members of her own family and left Maria Theresa with lasting health problems, she championed inoculation and invited the first 65 children to be inoculated to join her at dinner, where she herself served them. The young further benefitted from her hotly contested education reforms that offered opportunities to even the poorest children. This policy brought complaints not only from their parents, who wanted their children out working, but from the rich, who feared that increased literacy would pose a threat to the status quo.

Maria Theresa continued to reign as co-ruler after her husband's death and the succession of their eldest son, Joseph, in 1765. Whilst her spouse had been happy to let her lead, her son was not; he and his mother were in opposition on virtually every matter and their co-reign was tumultuous. Marie Theresa mourned Francis Stephen for the rest of her life and, as her husband had died on 18 August, spent the 18th of every month and the whole of August in solitude every year.

Maria Theresa died on 29 November 1780 at the age 63, having spearheaded a new era for the empire she inherited. Though far from liberal, she recognised the importance of considering her subjects from all social classes and understood you couldn't govern simply by giving the ruling classes what they wanted. Today she is remembered as a modernising ruler who trod the line between conservatism and Enlightenment, leaving a legacy that few could have expected at the start.

“Her reign is considered the Golden Age of Russia but her time on the throne was full of salacious scandal, intrigue and hidden truths”

1762 – 1796

CATHERINE
THE GREAT

How the unstoppable Russian ruler enthralled an empire with sex, lies and military might

She has gone down in history as 'Catherine the Great' thanks to her dedication and devotion to her adopted country. One of the Russian Empire's greatest leaders, Catherine oversaw its unprecedented expansion, a series of military successes and the arrival of the Russian Enlightenment. Her reign is considered the Golden Age of Russia but it was also full of salacious scandal, intrigue and hidden truths that others used to tarnish her legacy. So, what really happened during her reign?

Born in 1729 as Princess Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, Catherine was an impoverished German royal. Her prospects were dim until Elizabeth, empress of Russia, wrote to her mother proposing a match with her nephew and heir, Grand Duke Peter of Holstein. It was accepted and Sophie learnt to speak Russian fluently, greatly impressing Elizabeth. She was a perfect fit for the Russian throne.

In contrast, her betrothed was a terrible choice for an emperor. Born and raised in Germany, Peter was brought to Russia aged 14 and he hated it. He refused to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church – unlike Sophie, who converted and adopted a new name, Catherine, in 1744. A year later, the couple married in Saint Petersburg. Recalling the wedding in her memoirs, Catherine stated that her "heart predicted but little happiness; ambition alone sustained me."

Catherine thought greatness awaited her. Instead, her husband was a drunk who played with toy soldiers like a child. They despised each other and their marriage went unconsummated for several years. But Catherine didn't want to waste her life and she told herself that she would become "the sovereign Empress of Russia in [her] own right."

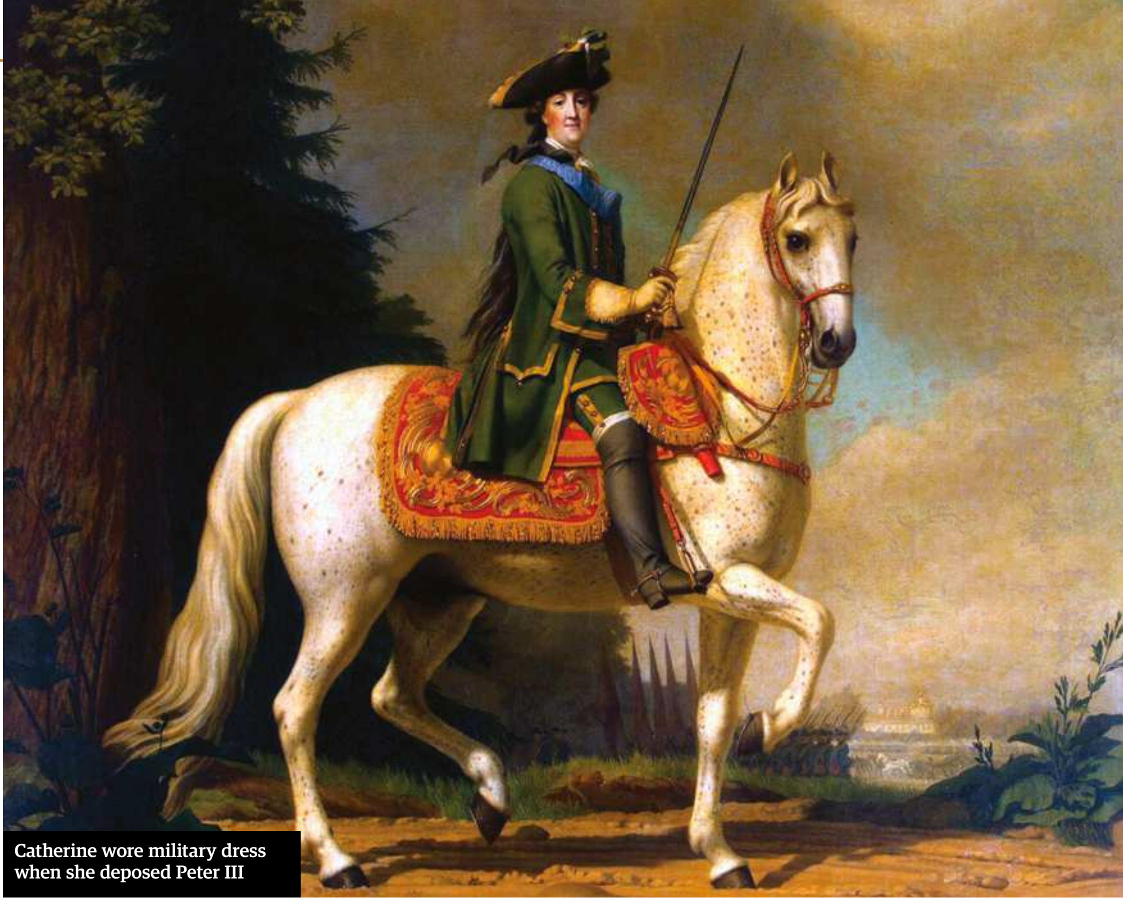
Catherine was isolated, unloved and desperate. After years of marriage and no heir, Elizabeth and the court were breathing down her neck. She had several affairs, firstly with Sergei Saltykov, a handsome rake and court member. Elizabeth actually encouraged their relationship, hoping it would result in a pregnancy.

Catherine finally gave birth to a long-awaited heir, Paul, in 1754. The paternity is still debated today but Catherine implied in her memoirs that it was Saltykov, though possibly only to spite Peter. Regardless, she had stabilised her position at court as the mother of the future emperor.

However, Catherine barely saw her baby as Elizabeth whisked him away and raised him herself. Catherine was devastated and her affair with Saltykov ended when he was sent away, too. Meanwhile, Peter's behaviour became foolish, worrying those around him. His wife, having fulfilled her duty, couldn't bear Russia crumbling in his insipid hands because he had failed to do his. She began to mastermind his downfall.

Elizabeth died in 1761 and Peter became Peter III. Catherine was now empress consort but it wasn't enough – she wanted sole power. Support for her grew after Peter's childish behaviour at Elizabeth's funeral, where he created a game to alleviate his boredom. Taking advantage, Catherine openly grieved for the deceased empress, winning many admirers in the process.

Peter skipped his own coronation and withdrew from the Seven Years' War – despite the fact Russia was winning – returning all the land that they had conquered from Prussia. His actions disrespected those killed or injured during ▶


Catherine wore military dress when she deposed Peter III

the conflict, alienating the army. His contempt for the Church and desire to wage war against Denmark, Russia's long-time ally, exacerbated the hatred towards him. He also flaunted his mistress, stating his desire to divorce Catherine and disinherit their son.

In April 1762, Peter publicly humiliated Catherine at a state banquet by denouncing her as a fool. Whispers circulated that night that the emperor, incensed and drunk, had ordered his wife's arrest, but he was dissuaded by Catherine's uncle, Prince Georg Ludwig of Holstein. Catherine knew that she and her son were now in grave danger.

The empress needed someone with influence and power for her coup. She started an affair with Grigory Orlov, a lieutenant of the Izmailovsky Guards. Catherine had chosen her new lover wisely. Alongside his brother and fellow guard, Alexei, he had the political influence that she needed to sway the imperial guardsmen to her faction.

Aside from the political benefits, the couple also fell deeply in love and Orlov was determined to see his beloved on the Russian throne.

However, there was one obstacle: Catherine fell pregnant with Orlov's child. Previously, Catherine and Peter had been sleeping together infrequently and she could claim that he was the baby's father, however unlikely that was. But as communication between the two had practically stopped, there was no denying a secret liaison. Nobody could uncover the truth, lest it risk Catherine risked losing her valuable supporters. She managed to hide her pregnancy under voluminous dresses for months, fooling everyone around her. In April 1762, she secretly gave birth to a little boy, who ended up being raised far away from court.

Peter soon left for Oranienbaum, in preparation for his fight against Denmark, while Catherine stayed at the nearby palace of Monplaisir. Her supporters prepared themselves, including the Orlov brothers, various guardsmen and Princess Dashkova, Elizaveta's sister. Even Nikita Panin, the politician entrusted as Paul's governor by Elizabeth, supported Catherine. With his control over her heir, Panin's backing was vital for the empress if she wanted the takeover to be seen as legitimate.

Peter ignored rumours of an impending coup but a conspirator was arrested on 27 June. Fearing that she would be exposed, Catherine, barely dressed, climbed into a waiting carriage and rode straight to Saint Petersburg in the early hours of 28 June. She headed to the barracks of her loyal guardsmen, visiting the Izmailovsky regiment first. The colonel of the regiment, Krill Razumovsky, had loved Catherine for years. They pledged their allegiance to her and those who resisted were arrested. The usurper made her way to the Winter Palace to be sworn in as Russia's new ruler, to the exclamation of the crowd there.

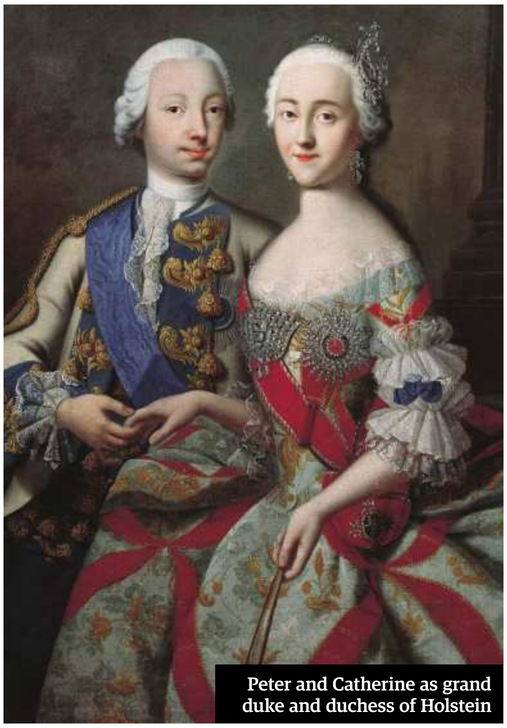
The seriousness of the situation sank in for Peter as he arrived at Monplaisir to find it abandoned, with Catherine long gone. Despairing, he begged with his estranged wife, hoping to negotiate an escape to his native duchy of Holstein with Elizaveta. The answer was no. Peter fell into a drunken stupor, while Catherine readied herself outside the Winter Palace, wearing the uniform of a male guard. Climbing onto her horse, it was time to arrest her husband.

"The seriousness of the situation sank in as he arrived at Monplaisir to find it abandoned, with Catherine long gone"

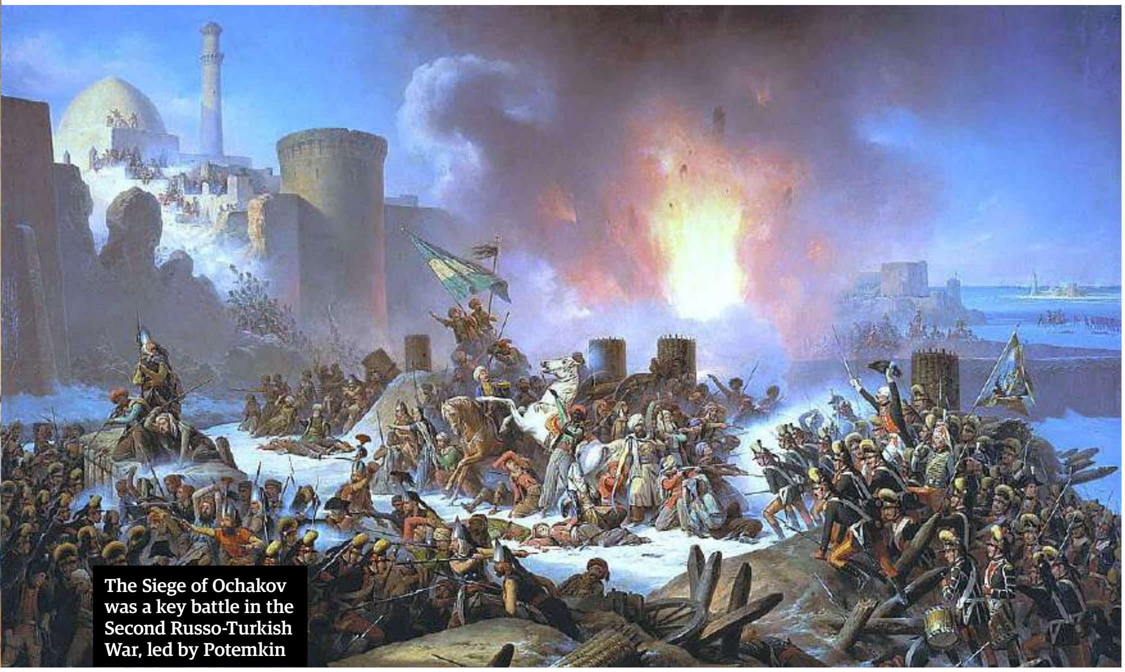
After Peter's arrest, Catherine sent him a document of abdication, which he was forced to sign. Just over a week later, Peter was killed at Ropsha while in the custody of Alexei Orlov. Catherine waited a day before issuing a statement, claiming that Peter died of "a haemorrhoidal colic." But as Peter's body lay in state, it was bloody and bruised, the hallmarks of strangulation likely committed by Alexei himself. When Alexei wrote to Catherine to inform her of Peter's illness, he stated ominously, "I fear that he might die tonight, but I fear even more that he might live through it."

As suspicions arose that Catherine had committed regicide, she became nervous that her reign was already tainted. Was she involved in Peter's death? It couldn't be proven, but her position was now more secure. Catherine wanted sole, autocratic power, yet some of her co-conspirators, namely Panin and Dashkova, expected her to assume the regency on behalf of her young son. Catherine remained stubborn and was finally crowned in September 1762.

Catherine discovered the Enlighenment movement as a young girl and dreamed of modernising Russia. Conversing with famous French philosophers of the day, Catherine had the opportunity to become the enlightened leader she craved to be. Yet, Russia was a mess. With a poor administrative system and a backwards economy, the country languished in the shadows of the other world powers. It needed a complete overhaul.


Peter and Catherine as grand duke and duchess of Holstein

Catherine wanted to introduce a better education system, build new cities, develop Russian culture



The Siege of Ochakov was a key battle in the Second Russo-Turkish War, led by Potemkin

and possibly abolish serfdom. She wrote the Nakaz, also known as the Great Instruction, a momentous piece that took her two years to complete. It was inspired by the principles of Western philosophers and formed Catherine's idea of the perfect government. In 1767, she presented it to the Legislative Commission, consisting of approximately 500 people from different classes of society. On the surface, it advertised Enlightenment thinking as a way to revitalise Russia – in reality, it reinforced Catherine's belief in absolutist monarchy.

The Commission failed to achieve anything before it was disbanded in 1768. It embodied Catherine's hypocrisy – she wanted to be perceived globally as an enlightened leader but the truth was a different story. The obvious example is the issue of serfdom. At one time, Catherine may have considered reforming or abolishing serfdom in the Russian Empire altogether but the economy depended too heavily on the workforce, who belonged to the aristocracy, and she relied on the nobles for support. Apart from slightly improving the rights of serfs, Catherine did nothing to better their situation throughout her reign.

Nevertheless, she accomplished some of her goals. She committed to improving education in Russia to bring it in line with the West and she founded academies, libraries and schools across her vast empire. For the first time, free schooling became available for all children – except serfs – and the curriculum became standardised. Furthermore, Catherine championed education for women and even established the Smolny Institute for young noble girls in Saint Petersburg in 1764.

A fierce patron of the arts, her personal artwork collection was the largest in Europe and she founded the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg in 1764. She imported Western literature and encouraged the arrival of foreign artists and architects to improve Russia culturally. The empress even sent Russian academics abroad to study Western culture and society and disseminate them back in the motherland.

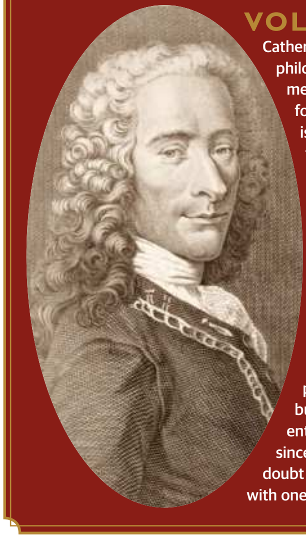
As for foreign affairs, Catherine took massive strides compared to her predecessors. She patronised her former lovers with titles, money and power throughout her reign, but there was one that she went the extra mile for – Stanisław Poniatowski. They had an affair back in 1755, when he was the Polish secretary to the British envoy in Russia, but it ended after he was forced to leave during the Seven Years' War, which pitched Russia against British-backed Prussia. He had hoped to reignite their romance but Catherine knew this was too dangerous and told him, "You are likely to get us both slaughtered."

Instead, when the Polish throne became vacant in 1763, Catherine promised it to Poniatowski. He was elected under the threat of the Russian military in 1764 and straight away, Poniatowski attempted to pass a series of reforms that weren't part of Catherine's plan. She needed Poland to remain weak and her former lover was supposed to be her puppet, not a lone wolf. When rebellion broke out in Poland in 1768, partly in reaction to Russian influence in the country, Catherine invaded under the pretence of restoring control.

Her dominance over Poland concerned Prussia, Austria and the Ottoman Empire, which had suffered a series of defeats during the ongoing Russo-Turkish War. These losses shifted the European power of balance in Russia's favour, but ▶

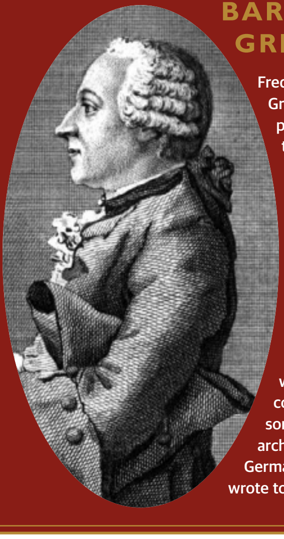
Enlightenment pen pals

Catherine corresponded with many of the great minds of her day



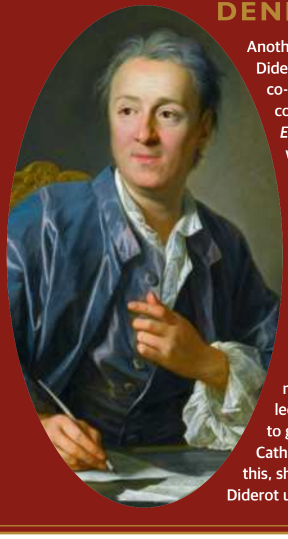
VOLTAIRE

Catherine and the French philosopher Voltaire never met but wrote to each other for years. While Voltaire is famous for savaging the French monarchy for its extravagance, he approved of Catherine's role as an 'enlightened despot', nicknaming her the 'Star of the North'. Some have interpreted Catherine's side of the correspondence as a public relations exercise, casting her in a more positive light in Europe, but she had been an enthusiastic reader of Voltaire since she was a princess, so no doubt she was flattered to chat with one of her adolescent idols.



BARON VON GRIMM

Frederich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, hung out in Paris' progressive literary circle thanks to his acquaintance with Jean-Jacque Rousseau. He wrote a cultural newsletter for foreign sovereigns and nobility that were keen to keep up with 18th-century French fashions. However, Catherine and Grimm also kept up a personal correspondence for 26 years. Grimm fed her tidbits about what was going on in European courts while she patronised some of Grimm's preferred architects. Despite both being of German descent, the pair always wrote to one another in fluent French.



DENIS DIDEROT

Another French thinker, Denis Diderot, is best known for co-founding and heavily contributing to the *Encyclopédie*, the definite work of Enlightenment thought. When the empress heard that he was in need of money, she offered to buy his library. She also appointed him caretaker of it until he died and paid him a 25-year salary in advance. Diderot felt obliged thank her in person in 1773, but the trip was mired when he tried to lecture her on the best way to govern Russia. Though Catherine dressed him down for this, she continued to patronise Diderot until his death in 1784.

Expansion of an Empire

How Catherine extended Russian territory

01 ALASKA COLONISATION, 1766

Catherine wrote to the governor of Siberia, declaring the indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands and the Alaska Peninsula to be Russian subjects. She instructed the Russian fur-traders to treat their new fellow subjects well. After this, tax collectors accompanied Russian fur-hunters on their voyages to Alaska and the government licensed fur-hunting expeditions.

02 FIRST RUSSO-TURKISH WAR, 1768-74

The first in a series of wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was sparked by a conflict over borders. Catherine's victory led to Russia expanding its influence in Europe and gaining territory in modern-day Ukraine. The Turks were forced to accept the Crimean Khanate's independence, giving an opportunity for Catherine to annex it later on.

03 PUGACHEV'S REBELLION, 1773-75

After Catherine usurped the throne, she faced a number of rebellions from pretenders, with the most serious revolt led by a Cossack, Yemelyan Pugachev. He claimed to be the deceased Peter III and his rebellion gathered pace as the government failed to see it as a legitimate threat. Catherine eventually had it suppressed, leaving thousands of rebels dead.

04 SECOND RUSSO-TURKISH WAR, 1787-92

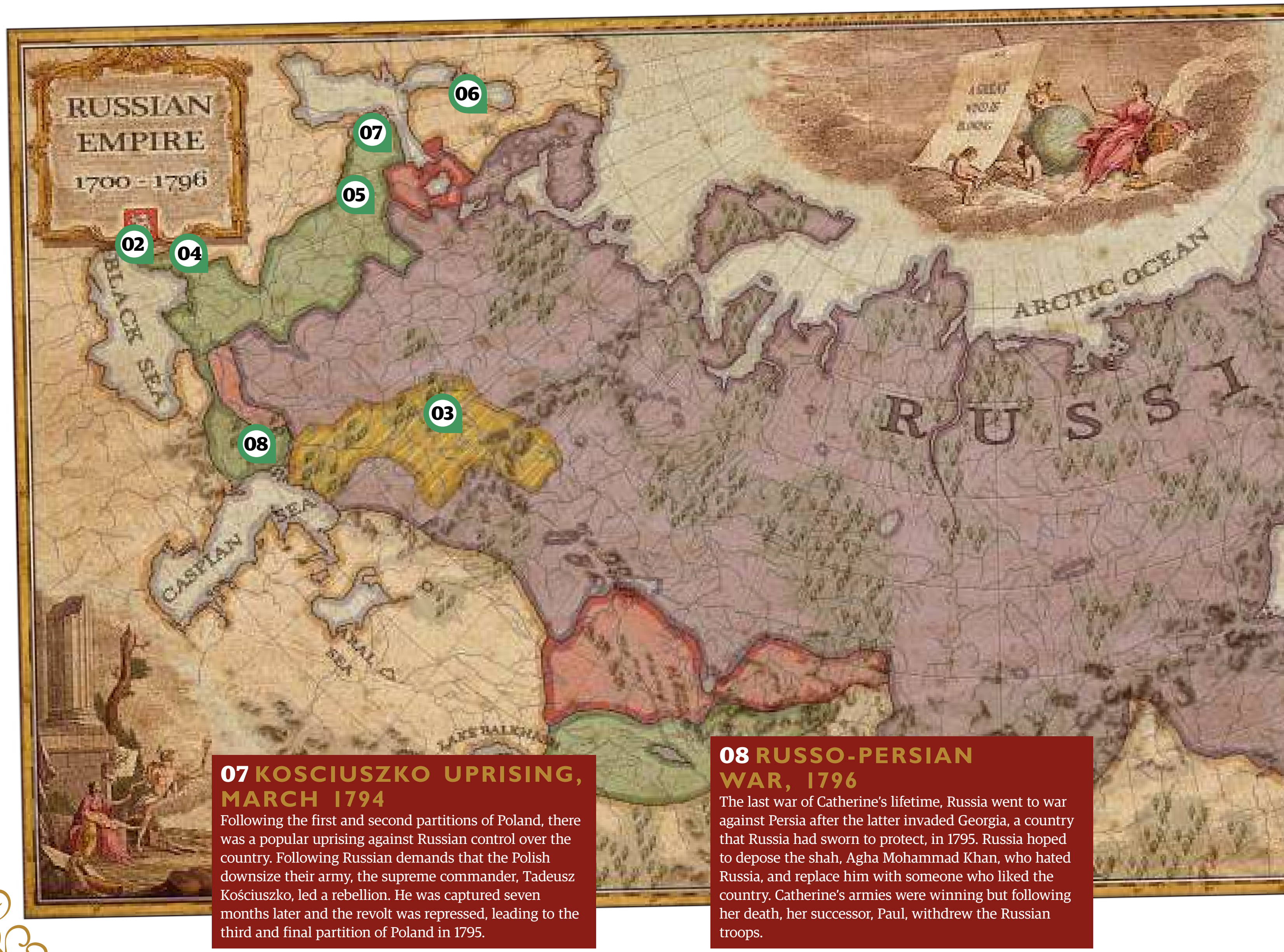
The Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia again. They attempted to regain the territory that they had lost to Russia but instead suffered a defeat. Following the Treaty of Jassy in 1792, the Turks were forced to accept Russia's annexation of Crimea that had occurred in 1783.

05 POLISH-RUSSIAN WAR, 1792

War broke out in Poland between the anti-Russian, pro-reform Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the anti-reform Targowica Confederation. The latter was supported by Catherine, who was angered by a new alliance between the Commonwealth and Prussia. Poniatowski believed Russia would eventually win and sought a ceasefire, to the anger of his allies.

06 RUSSO-SWEDISH WAR, 1788-90

The Ottoman Empire formed an alliance with Gustav III of Sweden against Catherine, his cousin. Gustav wanted to depose her, hoping that it would bolster his popularity in Sweden, but despite some success, the war racked up some serious debt. As for Catherine, she gained nothing from the conflict and wanted to reach peace deal, which was concluded in 1790.



07 KOSCIUSZKO UPRISING, MARCH 1794

Following the first and second partitions of Poland, there was a popular uprising against Russian control over the country. Following Russian demands that the Polish downsize their army, the supreme commander, Tadeusz Kościuszko, led a rebellion. He was captured seven months later and the revolt was repressed, leading to the third and final partition of Poland in 1795.

08 RUSSO-PERSIAN WAR, 1796

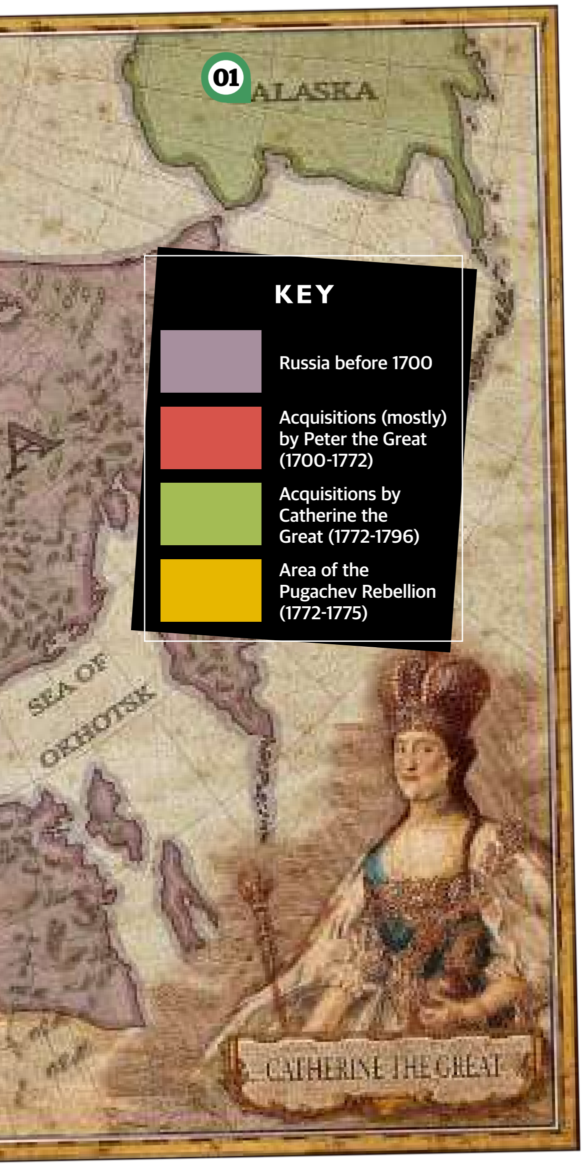
The last war of Catherine's lifetime, Russia went to war against Persia after the latter invaded Georgia, a country that Russia had sworn to protect, in 1795. Russia hoped to depose the shah, Agha Mohammad Khan, who hated Russia, and replace him with someone who liked the country. Catherine's armies were winning but following her death, her successor, Paul, withdrew the Russian troops.

the outbreak of bubonic plague in Moscow between 1770 and 1772 and the resulting riots pushed Catherine into seeking a truce as a reprieve.

To rebalance the power in Europe, Russia, Austria and Prussia agreed as neighbours of Poland to partition the country among themselves, without discussing it with the Polish king. Catherine gained around 92,000km2 of territory for her empire – almost the size of modern-day Portugal. It was the first of three partitions of Poland, which led to Poniatowski's downfall in 1795, a year before Catherine's death. He spent his final years in Russia, surviving on a pension from the empress.

Following Catherine's victory over the Turks in the Russo-Turkish War in 1774, tensions were high with the Ottoman Empire. With the territory she gained, she established a province to the south of Russia, known as New Russia (now part of modern-day Ukraine). When she annexed Crimea in 1783, a former Turkish territory, a second conflict broke out from 1787 to 1792. The Turks were heavily defeated again and Catherine's authority over Crimea was secured. It was one of the greatest military achievements of her reign.

"Orlov's relationship with Catherine sparked intrigue and jealousy from others, especially Panin"


01
ALASKA
KEY
🟪 Russia before 1700
🟥 Acquisitions (mostly) by Peter the Great (1700-1772)
🟩 Acquisitions by Catherine the Great (1772-1796)
🟨 Area of the Pugachev Rebellion (1772-1775)
SEA OF OKHOTSK
CATHERINE THE GREAT

During the trouble with Poland and the first Turkish war, Orlov dominated the court as Catherine's lover. She had given him lands and titles and credited for dealing with the Moscow plague riots. Catherine considered marrying him, until she realised it would be far too controversial. Despite concern about Orlov's power, he held no sway over Catherine, who knew that he was too politically inept and she consulted Panin instead.

Orlov's relationship with Catherine sparked intrigue and jealously from others, especially Panin, and by 1771, he was plotting his rival's downfall. His scheming paid off as Catherine discovered Orlov's various infidelities. Angered and heartbroken, she sent Orlov away from court, never to regain her favour again.

During her relationship with Orlov, Catherine became close to Grigory Potemkin. Their complicated love story is infamous. They met on the night of the coup and Catherine rewarded him for his loyalty by promoting him to gentleman of the bedchamber, a position that allowed them to meet frequently. Potemkin had loved Catherine ever since and he wasn't afraid of Orlov.

Potemkin openly declared his love for Catherine at every opportunity. She enjoyed his attention but was too hesitant to pursue anything, perhaps because of Orlov. However, Catherine didn't discourage Potemkin and began to forge him a political career – the start of his dramatic rise.

After suffering a severe eye injury, Potemkin suddenly left the court. Catherine missed him terribly and after 18 months, she demanded his return in 1767. She appointed him as an army paymaster and then as the Guardian of Exotic Peoples for her Legislative Commission, a politically important role. When the First Russo-Turkish War broke out, Catherine reluctantly allowed Potemkin to go to the front. After Orlov's dismissal, Catherine distracted herself with a new, younger lover, Alexander Vasilchikov, much to Potemkin's disappointment when he briefly returned in 1772. However, Catherine's interest in Vasilchikov faded quickly, and her thoughts turned back to Potemkin.

When Potemkin disappeared from court again at the start of 1774, Catherine finally accepted their love. He returned and their affair started, with Catherine in her mid-40s and Potemkin a decade younger. With his military experience, he was a useful advisor and the first of her lovers with whom Catherine shared power. She bestowed upon him a number of promotions, including governor-general of New Russia, granting him absolute power over the region.

Their love letters indicate that they secretly married. In one letter, Catherine refers to Potemkin as "my dear, sweet angel, my very own friend, my husband," and in another tells him that she'll "remain [his] true wife to the grave." Whether they actually married is uncertain, but considering the nature of the letters and Potemkin's influence at court, it is a possibility.

Unfortunately, their great love affair didn't last. Catherine and Potemkin were both passionate but, plagued with jealousies and insecurities, their relationship mutually cooled. By 1775, Catherine had a new favourite but Potemkin retained his position of personal and political influence over her for the rest of his life.

Scandalous gossip spread that the empress' lovers were vetted for their bedroom skills by one of her ladies-in-waiting before she slept with them. This was likely baseless slander, as Catherine's sexuality became the focus of lewd jokes and crude satires designed to criticise her in Russia and further afield in Europe. Yet, Catherine was no less powerful and neither was she ashamed.

While Potemkin was abroad as commander-in-chief during the Second Russo-Turkish War, Catherine met a vain young officer, Platon Zubov. At 22 years old, he was almost four decades younger than the empress, who was 60. Their affair began in 1789 and Catherine loved him deeply. She relied on him, perhaps because of her advanced age, and Zubov rose quicker than any of her previous lovers. However, the toy boy nature of this relationship opened the ageing empress up to sexual ridicule.

Potemkin's death in October 1791 left Catherine grief-stricken. He had been her pillar of strength and now she had to manage without him.

The empress lavished her attention on Zubov for the remainder of her life. He played a crucial role in making decisions and he was despised. Zubov even convinced Catherine to give his brother command over her army in the Russo-Persian conflict in April 1796, instead of a seasoned general. Although the younger Zubov returned victorious, there is no denying that this was a different ruler to the one who had usurped the throne three decades earlier.

Catherine passed away in November 1796. Perverse stories of her unbridled sexuality quickly surfaced, aimed at destroying her legacy. The most famous one claimed that she died engaging in bestiality with a stallion, which crushed her when its supporting harness snapped. In reality, Catherine collapsed following a stroke, and never regained consciousness.

1837 – 1901

QUEEN VICTORIA

Queen Victoria's record-breaking 63-year reign encompassed triumph, tragedy and the dawn of a new age

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CURZON

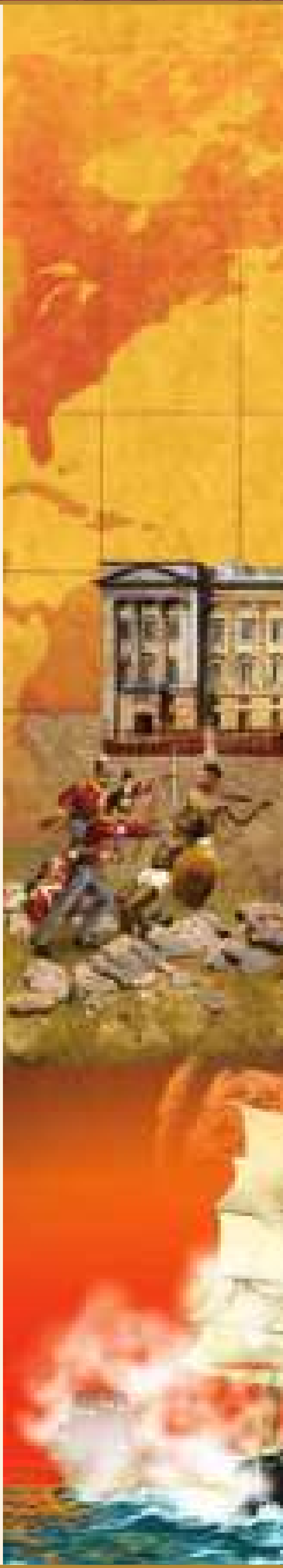
In 1836, at the last birthday dinner he would ever hold, King William IV gave a fiery speech that guaranteed the turbulent gathering its place in royal history. In front of a hundred illustrious guests, he turned on the Duchess of Kent, mother to his niece, Princess Victoria, and told her that he was determined to live just nine more months and see Victoria turn 18, the age at which she could succeed to the throne. Only then, thundered King William, once he knew that the Duchess and her cronies could never rule as regents in Victoria's stead, would he allow himself to die.

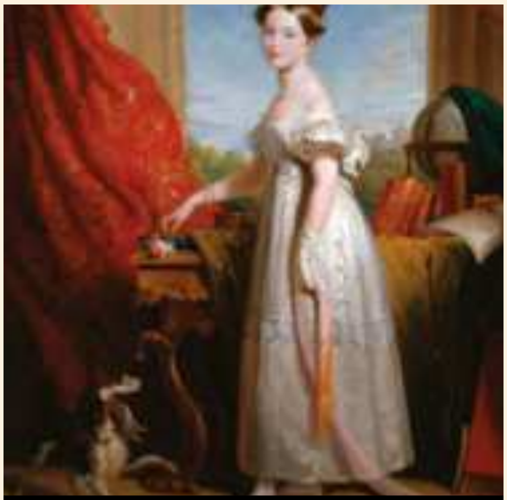
William kept his promise. Princess Victoria celebrated her 18th birthday on 24 May 1837. Barely one month later, William died and Queen Victoria ascended to the throne. She learned of her new role at six o'clock in the morning of 20 June 1837, when she was summoned from her bed with news of the King's death. As she signed her name to the first official papers she would see as monarch, she asked that her first name of Alexandrina be removed. From then on, she would be known by her second name: Victoria. Since Salic law prevented a woman from inheriting the crown of Hanover, Queen Victoria's succession changed the monarchical structure of Europe forever. The crowns had been shared since George I's succession, but now they divided and Victoria's paternal uncle, Ernest Augustus, became King of Hanover. He would be heir to the British crown too, until Queen Victoria produced an heir of her own.

> The coronation ceremony represented a much longed-for and finally obtained freedom for Victoria

One of the new queen's first acts was to ban Sir John Conroy, the manipulative comptroller of her mother's household, from her presence, and to move her mother to distant apartments. Conroy had been at the heart of the Duchess' plans for a regency and had long since dominated Victoria's life. Her decision to banish him sent a clear message that she would not be trifled with.

More than half a million people flocked to London to be part of the celebrations for Victoria's Westminster Abbey coronation on 28 June 1838. Immediately thereafter she moved into Buckingham Palace, becoming the first monarch to make their home in what would become an iconic residence. She enjoyed enormous popularity amongst her ▶





Victoria was devoted to her pets, in particular her spaniel, Dash

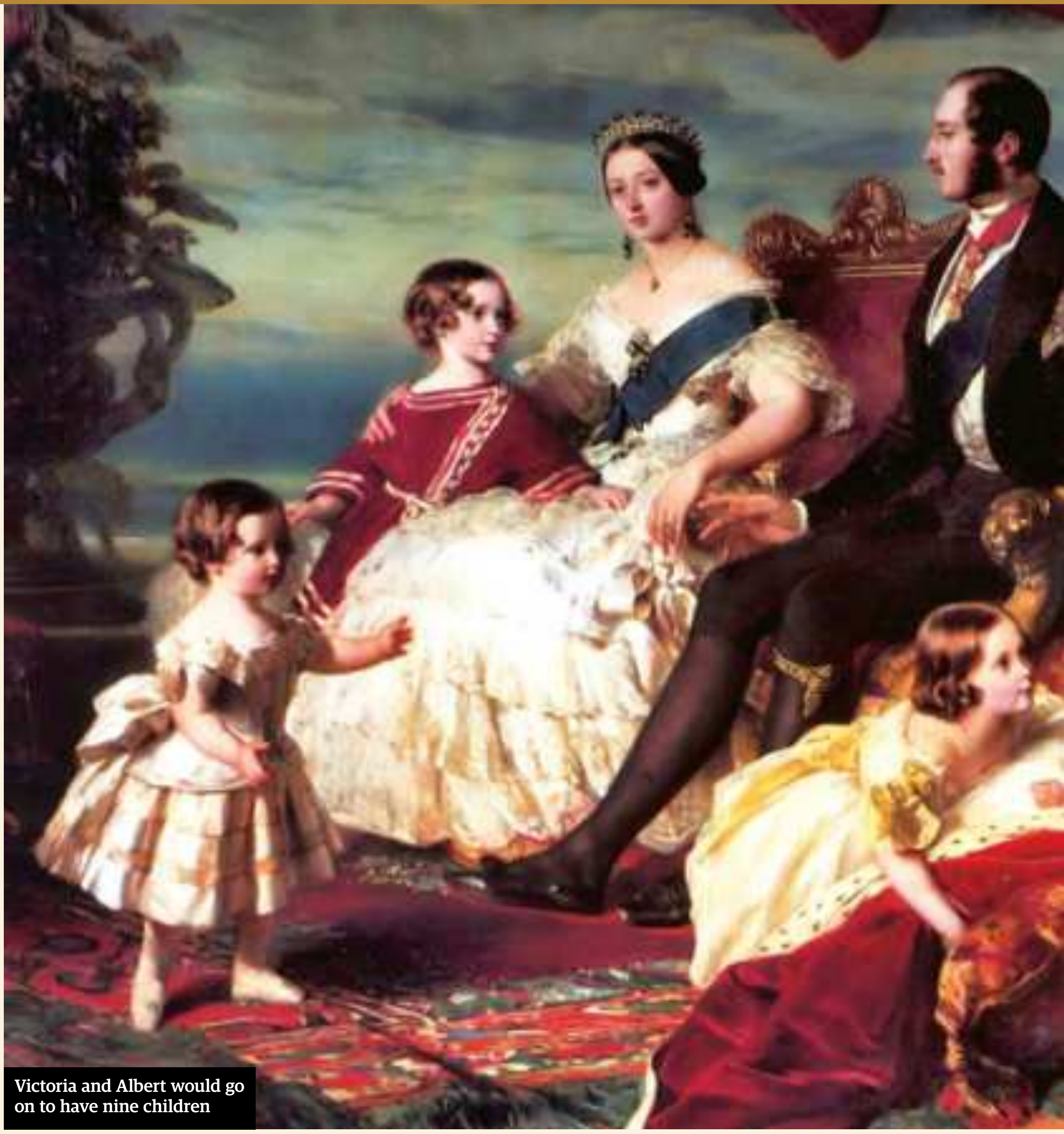
RAISING A FUTURE QUEEN

Victoria was never meant to be queen. Her father, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, was the fourth son with a jaded past, and with so many brothers it was assumed he and his children would never see the throne. Victoria's mother, the Duchess of Kent, was a princess of a German principality, and no doubt wished to bear her husband a son, rather than the solitary daughter they had. With her father's death less than a year after her birth, her mother went on to become the most dominant figure throughout her childhood.

The Duchess was keen to give her daughter a respectable upbringing befitting that of any upper-class girl, and Victoria was educated in languages, writing, music, history, drawing, arithmetic, geography and religion. Despite being described as energetic and warm-hearted, Victoria actually had few friends of her own age and would pour many of her thoughts into her now-famous journals.

Victoria's loneliness only worsened when it became apparent she would inherit the throne. Her mother's control over her increased massively, contributed to greatly by John Conroy. They created a strict set of rules known as the Kensington System. She was never allowed out of the sight of an adult, and her entire days were planned down to the minute. These rules were essentially designed to keep Victoria weak and dependant on both her mother and Conroy.

However, this failed spectacularly. Victoria possessed a stronger will than they could have imagined, and she grew to resent the system, rules and even her own mother. She saved most of her hate for Conroy, though, later referring to him as a "monster" and "demon incarnate". When she became queen, Victoria was quick to expel him from her household – and her life – for good.



Victoria and Albert would go on to have nine children

subjects, who looked forward to a new era under the reign of the young queen.

Queen Victoria inherited a Whig government led by Lord Melbourne, who swiftly became the new monarch's most trusted mentor. It was he who would guide her as she learned the ropes of her new role and many have speculated that their relationship was like that of father and daughter. Melbourne had no children and Victoria's father had died when she was still a young infant. With a childhood that had been dominated by her mother and Conroy, it isn't difficult to imagine how welcome she found Melbourne's guidance.

Victoria was barely two years into her reign when her popularity took its first major hit. When one of her mother's ladies-in-waiting, Lady Flora Hastings, began to display a bump on her abdomen, court gossips claimed that Flora was pregnant by Conroy. Queen Victoria demanded that Lady Flora submit to an examination to prove that she wasn't pregnant, a request that Flora refused even as she passionately protested her innocence. When Lady Flora finally submitted, Conroy made sure that the press knew exactly what was going on and the Queen found herself accused of spreading malicious gossip about an innocent and loyal subject. The examination showed that Lady Flora was not only a virgin, but that the growth was malignant, and public opinion turned against Victoria for her apparent bullying of a dying woman. Though she begged for Lady Flora's forgiveness, the public didn't forget the event so easily. After Lady Flora's death, the suddenly unpopular queen was booed and catcalled, with protesters sneering at the woman they had termed Mrs Melbourne.

Melbourne resigned in 1839 after a political defeat, but he continued to advise the Queen even though he was no longer prime minister. When Victoria invited Tory Robert Peel to form a new ministry, she unwittingly plunged herself into yet more drama. Peel intended to follow tradition and appoint his political allies to the royal household whilst installing their wives as bedchamber ladies to Victoria. Most of Victoria's attendants were the wives of Whigs and Melbourne advised the Queen to reject Peel's attempts to replace them. The Bedchamber Crisis exploded into a political argument and Peel, bridling at Melbourne's continued influence despite having stood down, refused to serve under such conditions. He resigned, leaving Melbourne to then return as prime minister.

Yet while she was navigating political waters, Queen Victoria had other things to think about too. She was unmarried and needed to produce an heir, and everyone had opinions on who her

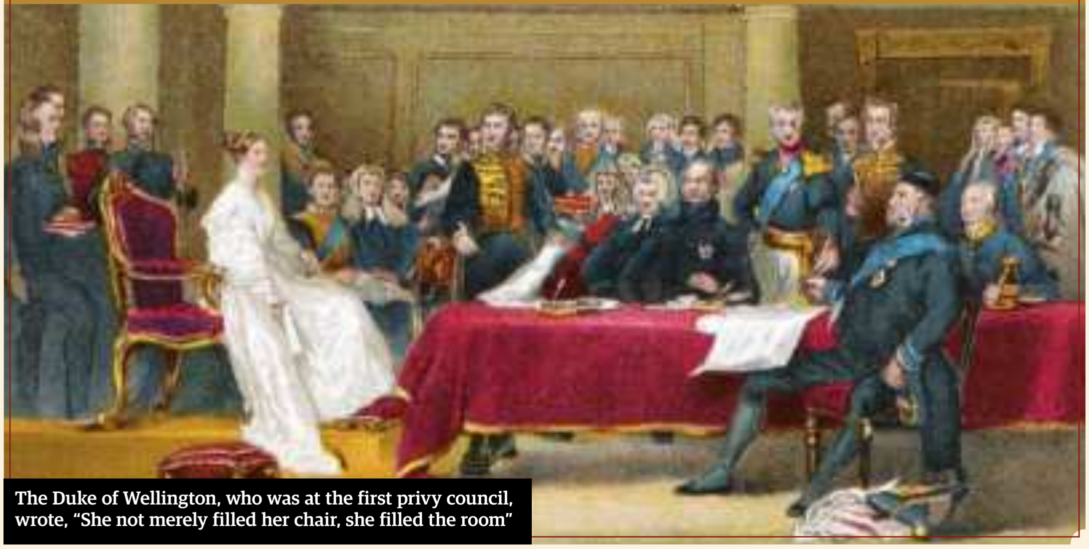
Republican stirrings

When Victoria ascended the throne, it wasn't just her inexperience that served as a barrier to success, but also her own people. Opinion of the monarchy was at an all-time low thanks to her predecessors and unpopular uncles.

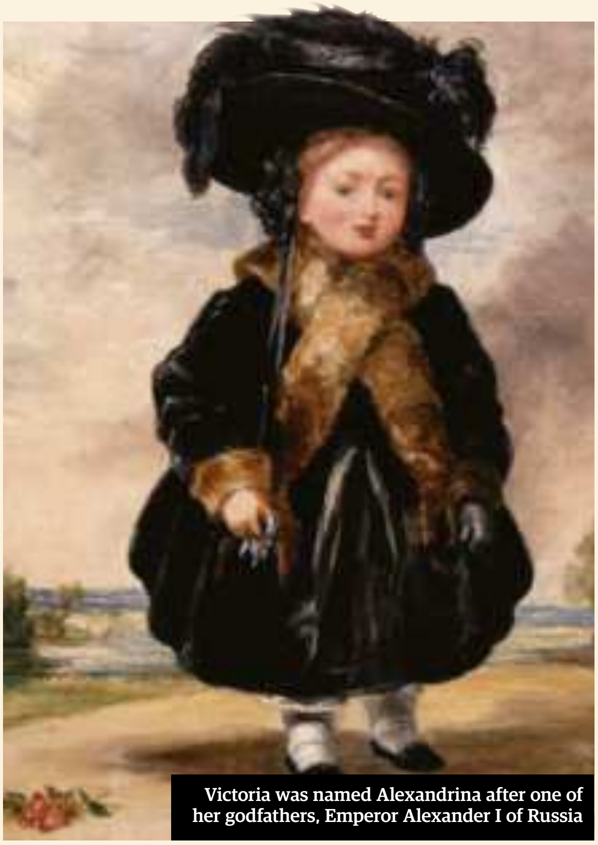
This dislike of the royals had been a gradual decline going back to George III, who became the scapegoat for the loss of America. His recurring and debilitating mental illnesses did little to restore faith in the crown, while his son, George IV, made matters worse. Not only were his extra-marital affairs common knowledge, but he was seen as wasting the tax payers' money on his own frivolities. George lived a life of heavy drinking and indulgence at a time when his countrymen were fighting the Napoleonic Wars.

Far from a national hero, he became a figure of contempt and loathing, with constant public mockery of his obese appearance. One of the King's aides privately penned, "A more contemptible, cowardly, selfish, unfeeling dog does not exist… There have been good and wise kings but not many of them… and this I believe to be one of the worst." By comparison, William IV, Victoria's predecessor, was initially more popular. His coronation was a simple affair – a far cry from his brother's extravagance. However, his reign became dominated by the Reform crisis, which ultimately diminished his standing.

When Victoria was crowned it was to a public who regarded the monarchy as one of "general moral squalor". It is no stretch to say that she faced increasing Republican opinions, and her battle to regain the trust of her subjects would be a long one.



The Duke of Wellington, who was at the first privy council, wrote, "She not merely filled her chair, she filled the room"



Victoria was named Alexandrina after one of her godfathers, Emperor Alexander I of Russia

husband should be. Melbourne advised her that marriage would forever end the lingering influence of the mother who had controlled her, though Victoria still had her doubts about so large a step. Victoria's maternal uncle, Leopold, had long since championed his nephew, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, and had introduced the couple in 1836. Though Victoria had been very impressed by her would-be suitor, certainly more so than she was by King William's preferred choice of Prince Alexander of the Netherlands, she didn't yet feel ready to marry. However, Albert had remained at the top of her list

Victoria invited Prince Albert to visit England for a second time in 1839 and it was during this October visit that she proposed to him. Albert accepted the proposal and the couple were married at St James's Palace on 10 February 1840. The marriage between Victoria and Albert, who took the title of prince consort, was one of mutual adoration. In her husband, Victoria found a second advisor and perhaps most important of all, a trusted best friend. She started her married life by moving her mother out of Buckingham Palace altogether, though Albert would make it a project to bring about a tentative reconciliation between the two.

Victoria's marriage, not to mention the assassination attempt that took place soon afterwards, and the birth of her first child that November, utterly transformed public opinion of her. Though Peel returned to power and succeeded in replacing Victoria's ladies in 1841, she was celebrated once more as she grew into her roles both as queen and as a wife and mother. Victoria took great interest in her duties and her governments, and was particularly keen to mend the relationship between Britain and France, in pursuit of which she and the French king made reciprocal visits. Eventually, France would become Britain's strongest ally due to the events of the Crimean War (1853 - 1856). Like those monarchs who had reigned before her, she began to display her patronages and made a personal donation of £2,000 to the British Relief Association to assist famine relief in Ireland. She also visited Ireland in an effort to quell the appetite for independence. ▶

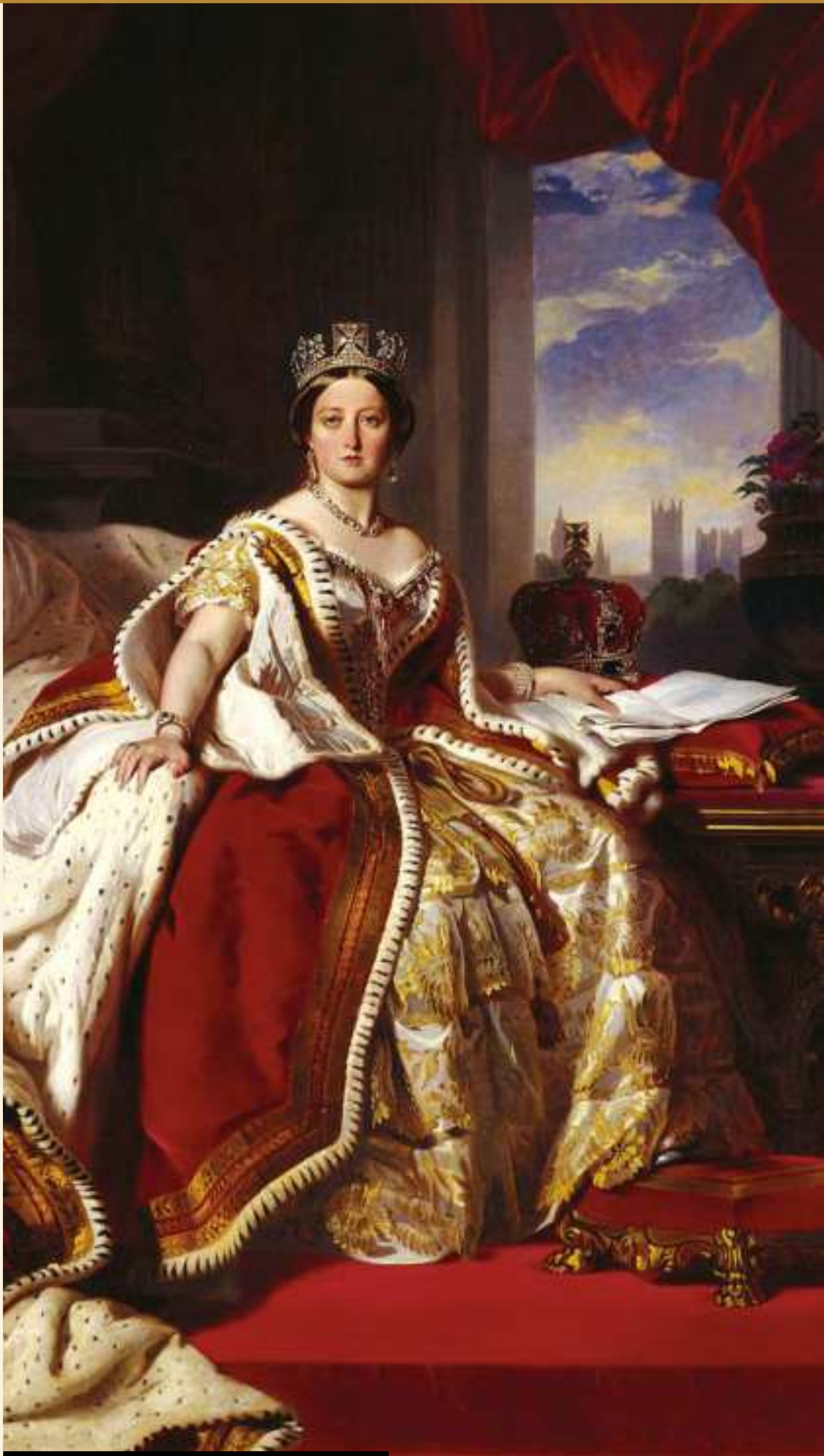
Victoria's first request as monarch was for something that she had never before experienced – an hour alone

In 1851, Prince Albert finally saw the fruition of his own brainchild, the Great Exhibition. The enormous event was held in Hyde Park between May and October and offered an opportunity for countries from all over the world to showcase themselves. Of course, Britain was intended to stand tall at the exhibition and Queen Victoria made over 30 appearances, encouraging her husband's passion project tirelessly. The couple also shared a love for photography, the very subject they had been discussing on the day of the Queen's proposal. Albert and Victoria collected and commissioned a huge number of photographic works and the Queen was keenly interested in innovations in the field. Two years after they had admired the photographic offerings at the Great Exhibition, Victoria appointed Antoine Claudet as the first ever photographer-in-ordinary to the royal court. Capturing images of the monarch was no longer the purview of the painter alone.

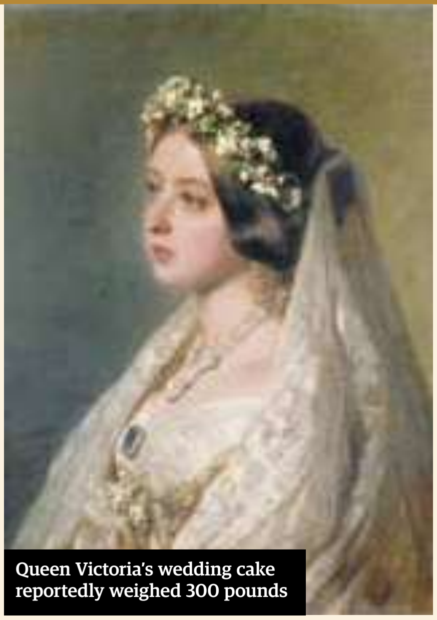
Queen Victoria gave birth to nine children by Albert; once again she made history as the first British queen to use chloroform during labour, despite the church's opposition to it. Although she was afflicted by post-natal depression, she continued with her duties throughout her pregnancies. Politically engaged and with a fascination for current affairs, she was particularly nonplussed when events forced her to appoint Lord Palmerston, whom she had never liked, as prime minister in 1855. Throughout her reign, Victoria was served by ten prime ministers, not always happily. However, she was particularly fond of Melbourne, a Whig, and Benjamin Disraeli, who was a Conservative.

Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Victoria, Princess Royal, married Prince Frederick William of Prussia in 1858. The couple had been betrothed for three years, since the bride was 14, and the Queen hoped that the marriage would lead to a new liberalism in Prussia. Victoria was devastated to lose Victoria, who would later serve as empress of Germany and queen of Prussia, and was deeply unhappy whenever she considered the marriages and partings yet to come. It was the first in a series of high-profile dynastic marriages that saw the British royal family extend its influence across the continent via weddings to the royal houses of Europe. Victoria and Albert's children would become the spouses of members of royal houses including Hesse-Darmstadt, Holstein, Hohenzollern, Romanov, and Battenberg. Amongst her children and grandchildren, Victoria could count kings and queens, as well as a host of other ranks and titles.

"She made history as the first British queen to use chloroform during labour"



Victoria's coronation didn't go entirely to plan - a ring was placed on the incorrect finger and took hours to remove



Queen Victoria's wedding cake reportedly weighed 300 pounds

When Victoria's mother died in 1861, the Queen was heartbroken. Thanks to Albert's efforts their relationship had improved considerably over the years, and the death of the Duchess of Kent ushered in a period of intense sadness for her daughter. In November of that year, Prince Albert travelled to Cambridge to see the couple's eldest son, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, to discuss rumours that he was having an affair with an actress. Albert caught typhoid fever on the trip and died on 14 December 1861. His death shattered Victoria, who blamed her son. Her mourning would last for the rest of her life and though she continued to perform her royal duties, Victoria withdrew into solitude. For several years the Queen was barely glimpsed in public, and it took the encouragement of her beloved uncle Leopold to change that. At his urging she visited the Royal Horticultural Society gardens in Kensington and rode through London in an open carriage so the public could finally see her again. It would not be until five years after Albert's death that Victoria attended another State Opening of Parliament.

Victoria's profound sense of sadness deepened in 1878 with the death of her daughter, Alice. Deep in mourning, she even considered abdication in opposition to Benjamin Disraeli's refusal to act against Russia during the Russo-Turkish War, but ultimately did not carry out her threats. As prime minister, Disraeli usually enjoyed Victoria's unwavering support, and when he died in 1881, she was deeply affected at the loss of a man she had respected so much. She had long disliked his successor, William Gladstone, and considered him the worse prime minister who ever served.

Queen Victoria and her subjects celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 1887, when she hosted a state banquet before attending a procession and thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey. Just under a decade later she became the longest-ruling monarch the country had ever seen, but held off on celebrating until her Diamond Jubilee the following year. Those celebrations were a chance for the public to show their respect and affection for their queen and for Victoria to take part in a six-mile procession through London that culminated in a service of thanksgiving outside St Paul's Cathedral. An enormous crowd gathered to show their love for the monarch, who had lived through so much.

The Diamond Jubilee was a triumph for Queen Victoria, even though ill health continued to blight her. She died at 6.30pm on 22 January 1901, with her eldest son, Edward VII, and grandson Wilhelm II at her side. As her last request, she asked that her dog, Turi, be settled on her deathbed to comfort her in her final moments. Victoria was the last monarch of the house of Hanover and the second longest reigning monarch in British history; only the reign of the late Queen Elizabeth II has surpassed her 63 years on the throne.

Long live the queen

Victoria faced many potential assassins during her reign

Despite being one of the most beloved monarchs in British history, Victoria ruled at a time of great social change and upheaval. Not everyone was satisfied with her reign, and as such a powerful symbol of empire, she found herself at the end of a barrel many times.

EDWARD OXFORD *1840*

Victoria and Albert were travelling in a carriage along Constitution Hill when a young man fired twice upon the carriage before being seized. Oxford was deemed insane and confined "at Her Majesty's pleasure".

JOHN FRANCIS *1842*

In a very similar attempt to the first, a man attempted to fire at the royal couple in their carriage. He was apprehended by a police officer, and as he tried to seize the pistol, it went off. Francis was sentenced to death, but Victoria changed this to transportation.

JOHN WILLIAM BEAN *1842*

Bean, a humpbacked boy, pushed his way to the front of a crowd and brandished a pistol at the royal couple. He said he did not intend to shoot her, but wished to be transported. He was imprisoned for 18 months.

WILLIAM HAMILTON *1849*

Again the royal carriage was fired on as it travelled down Constitution Hill, but this time the Queen was alone. The shooter was a poor Irishman, and although the police did not view the attempt to be serious, he was sentenced to seven years transportation.

ROBERT PATE *1850*

Victoria, while with three of her children, was struck on the head with a cane. The mob that seized the attacker was so furious the police had trouble apprehending the man. Although of unsound mind, Pate was sentenced to seven years transportation.

ARTHUR O'CONNOR *1872*

In the gardens of Buckingham Palace, a young boy pointed a pistol at Victoria's head. He told her to sign a Fenian document, but the Queen merely bowed her head. He was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and 20 strokes with a birch rod.

RODERICK MACLEAN *1882*

This final attempt occurred when the Queen was entering her carriage at Windsor. A man fired upon her but Victoria was quick to inform her son, "I am nothing the worse". The Irish shooter was acquitted on the grounds of insanity.

CHINA'S SHADOW EMPRESS

The extraordinary tale of Empress Dowager Cixi, the teenage concubine who rose to become the most powerful woman in China

WRITTEN BY JESSICA LEGGETT

Empress Dowager Cixi is one of the most formidable and divisive figures in Chinese history. A contemporary of Queen Victoria, she was only the second woman to rule China after Empress Wu Zetian. So how did Cixi, the Emperor's lowly mistress, become the ruler of nearly a third of the world's population?

Cixi was born in Beijing on 29 November 1835. She was from a Manchu family, the ruling ethnic minority in China, and it is thought that her relatives were government employees. As a Manchu girl, she was spared the fate of having her feet bound, a practice that was performed on Han Chinese girls.

Sadly, little is known of Cixi's life before she joined the imperial court, but it is believed that she was taught how to sew, read and write a little. It is also said that her father sought her advice and valued her opinion just as highly as a son's.

At 16, Cixi was chosen from hundreds of candidates to be a concubine for the Qing dynasty's Xianfeng Emperor. She arrived in the Forbidden City in June 1852 to join the imperial harem. The harem had eight ranks and Cixi was placed in the sixth rank of 'Noble Lady' and given the name 'Noble Lady Lan'.

Cixi was a low-ranking concubine in the harem, but everything changed when she gave birth to Xiafeng's firstborn son, Zaichun, on 27 April 1856. His birth was widely celebrated and Cixi became the second most powerful woman in the harem. After succeeding where the Emperor's other concubines and his main consort, Empress Ci'an, had failed, Cixi was awarded the title of 'Noble Consort Yi'.

Ci'an remained childless but Zaichun was officially considered her son and she was in charge of his upbringing rather than Cixi. Despite this, there was no tension between the two women and they became close friends.

As Cixi rose through the ranks, China was in turmoil. The Taiping Rebellion, a bloody uprising against the Qing dynasty, had started in 1850 and was still going strong. On top of this, China was also fighting the British and French empires in the Second Opium War, which had erupted shortly after Zaichun's birth.

China was losing the war and by August 1860 the combined British and French forces were marching towards Beijing. Xianfeng dispatched envoys to conduct peace talks but British envoy, Harry Parkes, and his men were arrested and tortured by the Qing at the meeting. In retaliation, Lord Elgin, leading the British Army, ordered the looting and burning of the Old Summer Palace. By this point, Xianfeng, Cixi and the rest of the imperial household had already fled Beijing.

After this attack, Xianfeng, whose health had been deteriorating for some time, turned to alcohol and drugs. He died on 22 August 1861, leaving behind his five-year-old son to succeed him as Emperor. Before his death, Xianfeng had arranged for eight regents to act on Zaichun's behalf until he was old enough to rule alone.

Following the death of their husband, Cixi and Ci'an were given the title of 'Empress Dowager', and it was from this point on that Cixi became known as 'Empress Dowager Cixi'. Meanwhile, after ascending the imperial throne, her son Zaichun became known as the Tongzhi Emperor.

Tensions between the Empresses Dowager and the regents escalated at court and as her husband's health declined, Cixi became more involved in the court's political life. Yet the regents were uninterested in listening to a woman. Ci'an had no taste for politics and annoyed by the frequent confrontations with the regents, she often refused to attend court audiences, leaving Cixi to face them alone.

Cixi suggested to Ci'an that they oust the regents and reign together as co-regents. It was a risky scheme and to succeed, the women knew that they needed powerful, male allies. Cixi immediately rallied support for their coup, including Xianfeng's half-brothers, Princes Gong and Chun. Gong, in particular, was ambitious and was annoyed by the regents sidelining him.

In November, Cixi accused the regents of incompetency for their handling of the negotiations with Britain and France in the aftermath of the Beijing invasion. The regents were dismissed and arrested for treason, with three of them sentenced to death by linchi, also known as 'death by a thousand cuts'. In an act of so-called mercy, Cixi reduced these sentences and had the leading regent decapitated while the other two men were encouraged to commit suicide. ▶

Cixi and Ci'an had successfully seized power at the ages of 25 and 24 respectively in what became known as the Xinyou Coup. Assuming the regency, the two women were now in charge of making decisions, and they formed an effective partnership. Ci'an handled administrative matters such as official appointments, while Cixi revelled in politics and policy formation.

However, according to the ancient court laws, women could not attend imperial audiences nor speak with a man face to face. Consequently, Cixi sat behind the young emperor on the throne obscured by a screen, a practice that became known as to 'rule from behind the curtain'.

Prince Gong, who had been appointed as Tongzhi's Prince Counselor, backed the Empresses Dowager along with the Grand Council. But Cixi was the one who wielded the real power and she stripped Gong of his title in 1865, fearing that he was becoming too powerful – she couldn't risk her power being usurped by someone else.

During the first few years of Cixi's regency, China experienced a period of revitalisation known as the Tongzhi Restoration. Despite her conservative views, Cixi understood that China needed to modernise, so she looked to the West for knowledge and trade opportunities, and established a customs service. Cixi also sought out people who would support rather than oppose her policies, making an effort to combat government corruption and maintain stability. During this time, the Taiping Rebellion was finally put down after 14 years.

Tongzhi married the Jiashun Empress in 1872 when he was 16 years old. While Ci'an approved of the bride, Cixi opposed the marriage because Jiashun's grandfather was one of the deposed eight regents. As Tongzhi failed to spend time with his concubines, Cixi grew more resentful of Jianshun, believing that the young couple were not dedicated enough to learn how to rule China.

Frustrated, Cixi forced the couple to separate. Tongzhi, distraught and lonely, supposedly sought solace by frequenting brothels. He died in 1875, and while the official cause of death was smallpox, it was widely assumed that he contracted syphilis from visiting prostitutes. Since the Emperor had no children, Tongzhi's death caused a succession crisis. Cixi chose Tongzhi's four-year-old cousin, Zaitain, to become the new Emperor. He was the son of Prince Chun and Wanzhen, Cixi's younger sister, and after ascending the throne, he became known as the Guangxu Emperor. Guangxu was subsequently adopted by Cixi and Ci'an, who remained as regents.

Cixi and Ci'an's joint rule provided the stability that China needed to start modernising. However, Ci'an's sudden death in April 1881 ended their partnership after two decades. Cixi was suspected of poisoning her fellow Empress Dowager, but this has never been proven. Guangxu married Jingfen, Cixi's niece, in 1889 and Cixi retired to the rebuilt Summer Palace, handing power to the Emperor.

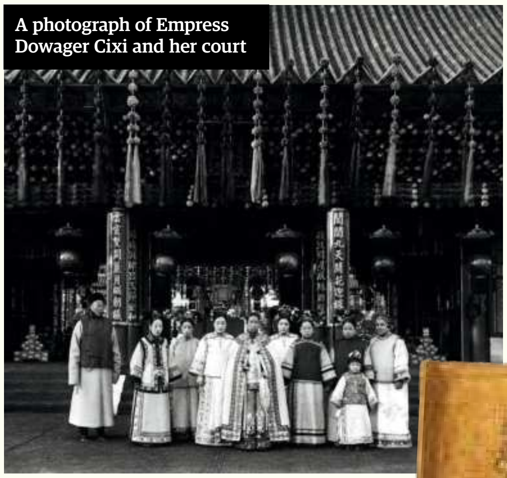
Disaster struck just a few years into Guangxu's personal rule. The First Sino-Japanese War erupted in July 1894 between Japan and China, primarily over the Korean Peninsula. While Cixi had developed the Chinese navy during her regency, Guangxu had halted naval and military development and maintenance. With a navy that was no match for the Japanese fleet, the Qing government was defeated.

Guangxu and his government sought peace with Japan in February 1895, and the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed two months later. China was required to pay Japan substantial war reparations and cede territory, including Taiwan, as part of the terms.

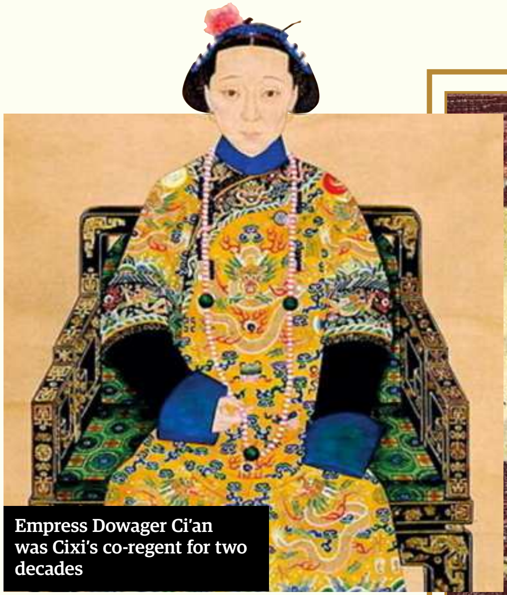
Guangxu believed that if the Qing dynasty was to survive, drastic reform was required following China's humiliating defeat and concessions to Japan. Under the influence of reformist Kang Youwei and his student, Liang Qichao, he began the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898. Guangxu issued numerous reform edicts aimed at modernising every aspect of Chinese society. Among these reforms, he wanted to abolish the old civil examination system and develop a constitutional monarchy, like those seen in Japan and the West.

Guangxu hoped to safeguard China's future, but his desire for broad reform enraged conservative officials, including Cixi. She staged a coup in September, seized the regency and put Guangxu under house arrest at the Summer Palace. Although Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao fled abroad, Cixi arrested and executed six of their fellow reformers.

It is often stated that Cixi imprisoned Guangxu permanently following the coup, but he kept his title of Emperor and continued to play a role in government. According to letters from officials and foreign diplomats, he attended court audiences and he even made personal comments on memorials to the throne, the official communication to the Emperor.



A photograph of Empress Dowager Cixi and her court



Empress Dowager Ci'an was Cixi's co-regent for two decades

Most of the information circulated about Cixi over the last century or so that has shaped her story has been the result of Kang's propaganda. In exile, he claimed that Guangxu asked for help in securing his freedom and that Cixi would try to kill the Emperor, portraying himself as a heroic reformer forced out by her. He also claimed that Cixi used the navy's funds to rebuild the summer palace, preventing it from developing and resulting in China's defeat at the hands of Japan.

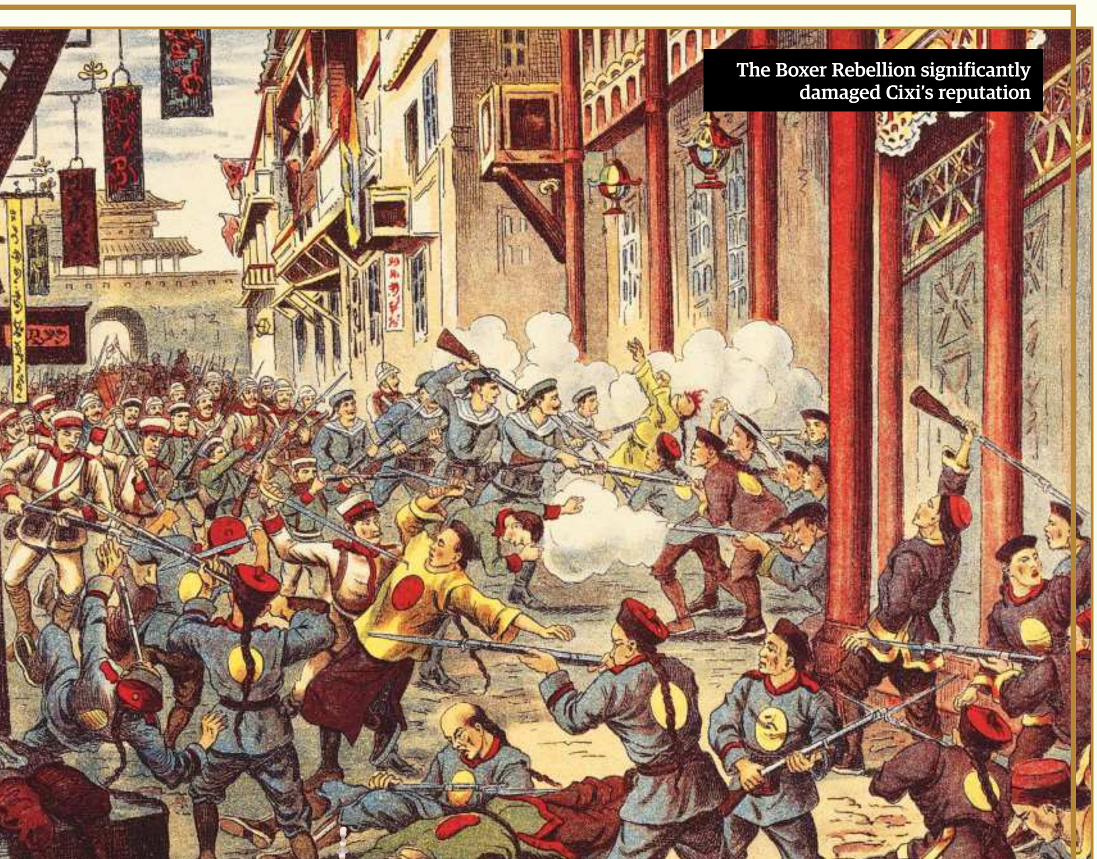
But Cixi had more pressing concerns than Kang. The Boxer Rebellion erupted in November 1899, with rebels violently attacking foreign diplomats, missionaries, and Chinese Christians. Known as the Boxers, the rebels were members of a secret society, the 'Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists', who initially opposed the Qing dynasty before focusing their vitriol towards foreigners. Cixi, seeing this as an opportunity to rid China of foreign interference, openly announced her support for them.

Cixi's support for the Boxers increased their violent attacks. To end the rebellion, the Eight-Nation Alliance – which included Britain, France, and Japan – occupied Beijing in August 1900. Cixi fled the city with the Emperor to Xi'an, where she stayed for the next 18 months.

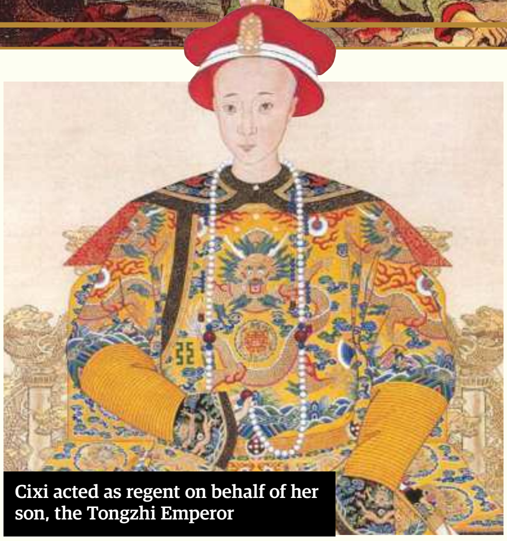
After negotiations, the rebellion ended in 1901, with China forced to pay a large indemnity to the

In 1863, Tongzhi issued a decree ordering the ministries to fully support the Empress Dowagers while he was ill

> *"Cixi's decision to accept reform, however, appears to have come too late"*



The Boxer Rebellion significantly damaged Cixi's reputation



Cixi acted as regent on behalf of her son, the Tongzhi Emperor

Prince Gong was an ambitious man and a powerful ally of Cixi's

foreigners. Cixi even issued an uncharacteristic 'decree of self-reproach', accepting responsibility for the rebellion.

Cixi realised that China needed serious reform when she returned to Beijing in 1902. Implementing reforms that she had stopped four years earlier with her coup, Cixi abolished the examination system, torturous punishments such as linchi, outlawed the practice of foot-binding, and worked to improve girls' education. Cixi even issued reforms to establish elected assemblies and move towards a constitutional monarchy.

Cixi died on November 15, 1908, just one day after Guangxu, after ruling China for nearly five decades. Guangxu had no children and Cixi had not trained a successor, unwilling to risk losing the power and influence that she had worked so hard to achieve. Cixi chose two-year-old Puyi, Guangxu's half-nephew, to succeed as Emperor shortly before her own death.

Cixi's reforms, however, came too late. Three years later, the Qing Dynasty fell apart, and Puyi was forced to abdicate in 1912, ending two thousand years of imperial rule in China.

Cixi's story is mysterious and speculative in many ways. Although revisionists have praised her efforts to modernise, she has been repeatedly vilified and subjected to damaging propaganda that blames her for Imperial China's demise. While Cixi had her detractors both during and after her lifetime, she was undeniably a powerful woman and a force to be reckoned with. ◆

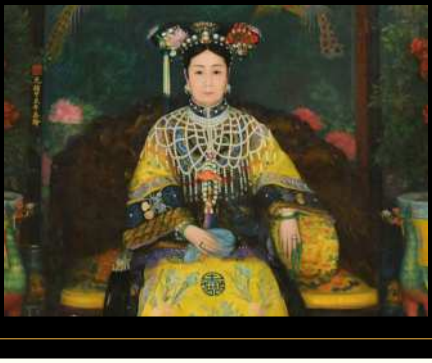
Rehabilitating Cixi

THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WENT ON A PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN OF HER OWN

Cixi's reputation was severely tarnished after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. Foreign visitors were invited to receptions at the palace to improve her image. After her return to Beijing, she even invited the wives of foreign diplomats – whose lives had been threatened by the violent Boxers she had encouraged – to tea at the Forbidden City.

Xunling, a young photographer, took a series of staged portraits of Cixi and her court between 1903 and 1904, with the Empress Dowager becoming one of the first in the imperial court to engage with photography. These photos, the only ones to exist of Cixi, were rich in symbolism, emphasising her imperial authority and earning her the moniker 'the dragon lady'. These photographs, show Cixi's face to the world and provide a rare glimpse into the imperial court.

In 1903, Cixi's portrait was painted by American artist Katharine A Carl for the 1904 St. Louis World Fair. President Theodore Roosevelt later received the portrait from Cixi as a gift and he donated it to the Smithsonian Institution.



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1890 – 1948

QUEEN WILHELMINA, OF THE NETHERLANDS

The story of a queen who did all she could for her nation from afar

When King Willem III of the Netherlands died in 1890, he left behind a dilemma. He had only one surviving child, Wilhelmina, but she was just ten years old, too young to reign.

Wilhelmina's tenure on the throne began with her mother, Queen Emma, acting as her regent. Eight years later, when Wilhelmina reached her majority, she was finally able to take her place as queen in her own right. From then, her popularity only grew - from the get-go, she made it perfectly clear that she loved her people and had a particular dislike for politicians.

The first few years of her reign were fairly uneventful (except for some wise investments that made her the world's richest woman as well as the world's first female billionaire). World War I saw some trouble, even though the Netherlands was officially neutral. Dutch ships were still included in an Allied blockade of Germany, which severely restricted Dutch imports. Wilhelmina also granted the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm asylum, despite complaints from the Allies.

But it was World War II that saw Wilhelmina come into her own as a leader. When it was clear that German attention was turning towards the Netherlands, Wilhelmina was adamant that Dutch spirit would prevail. Just three days before her country was invaded in May 1940, she and her family fled to London, despite her protests that she stay behind to coordinate defences. A month later, her daughter and granddaughters headed to Ottawa, Canada, but Wilhelmina remained, taking charge of the Dutch government in exile. She set up Radio Oranje, sending messages from the UK to the Netherlands to keep spirits up and rally her people. In one broadcast, she slated Hitler as "the archenemy of mankind".

When the Third Reich was ousted in 1945, Wilhelmina was welcomed back to her country with open arms. She was beloved by her people and respected by leaders around the world.

Unfortunately, the end of her reign saw a decline in her popularity and her health. In 1948, she abdicated in favour of her only child, Juliana, and retired to Het Loo Palace until her death in 1962.

Queen Wilhelmina was the longest-reigning monarch of the Netherlands, with a reign of 58 years

Wilhelmina's inauguration as queen in the Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam, 1898

During World War II, Wilhelmina spoke to her nation through Radio Oranje (or Radio Orange)

© Alamy, Getty

1891 - 1893

LILI'UOKALANI

The last queen of Hawaii fought for the independence and freedom of her people until the very end

Hawaii's last monarch - and only queen regnant - reigned for just two years, but her legacy is far from forgotten. Born Lydia Kamakaeha, she was never supposed to rule - it was only when her younger brother died in 1877 that she was made crown princess.

During her life as a princess, she acted as a regent while her older brother, who was king, was on a world tour. She spent a lot of time organising schools for Hawaii's youth, and was received by both US President Grover Cleveland and the UK's Queen Victoria.

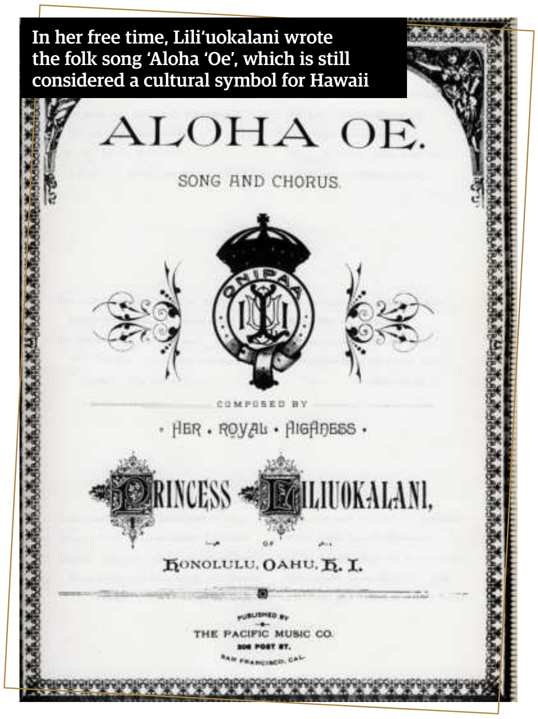
When she came to the throne in 1891 as the first woman to rule the archipelago, the power of the monarchy had already been diminished. The United States was beginning to enjoy commercial privileges and was already in control of Pearl Harbor - Lili'uokalani wasn't exactly best pleased about that. Her focus became trying to implement a new constitution to restore some of the monarchy's powers and stop foreign influence.

Lili'uokalani was a gifted songwriter and composer, writing over 160 songs and chants during her lifetime

It did not go to plan. In January 1893, the Missionary Party, made up of Americans, asked for her abdication. They then declared that she had been deposed and that a provisional government was being established, preparing for the United States to annex the islands. To avoid bloodshed, in the best interests of her people, Lili'uokalani surrendered, but she wasn't out of options. Thanks to the connections she made in all her years as a princess, she was able to appeal to President Cleveland to reinstate her to the throne.

A statue of Lili'uokalani stands in Honolulu, Hawaii

What the American businessmen in Hawaii - known as the haole - hadn't quite anticipated was for Cleveland to say yes. He ordered that Lili'uokalani be restored as queen and rejected the treaty of annexation that had been sent to Congress by the president before him.



In her free time, Lili'uokalani wrote the folk song 'Aloha 'Oe', which is still considered a cultural symbol for Hawaii

ALOHA OE.

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It would be a rough two years before Lili'uokalani officially signed a formal abdication - royalists (with even some Americans on their side) tried to lead an insurrection, but the Missionary Party, who had gone against their president claiming that he didn't have the authority to interfere, won out in the end.

Today, she is remembered as a woman who fought tooth and nail for her land and people. As one of the most influential women in Hawaiian history, she set up a trust to look after orphaned and destitute children in what was once her kingdom in 1909. She is a figure that Hawaiians always look on with pride.

"To avoid bloodshed, in the best interests of her people, Lili'uokalani surrendered"

© Alamy, Getty

1952–2022

ELIZABETH II

The longest reigning monarch in British history, Queen Elizabeth II was a beacon of stability during seven decades of extraordinary change

Queen Elizabeth II may not have led armies into glorious battle or faced down bloodthirsty rebellions in far-flung corners of her realm, yet she remains one of the most popular and beloved rulers to have ever worn the crown. Her reign as queen was also the longest ever by a British monarch as she surpassed Queen Victoria's 63-year reign in 2015. Such a lengthy tenure may seem less noteworthy in an age removed from murderous plots and usurping royal relatives, but Elizabeth had nonetheless sat resolute in her duties through the latter half of the 20th Century and the burgeoning years of the 21st - a time when the Western world metamorphosed in the wake of two world wars. Britain and her many territories had undergone quite the transformation, and the role of monarch and the royal family has changed drastically along with it.

After WWII, the young Elizabeth saved up her ration coupons to afford the material for her wedding dress

After seven decades as the head of state, Elizabeth faced the many perils, challenges and benefits of being a monarch in the modern age. Gone are the threats of invasion, intrigue and insurrections, replaced instead by satire, media scandals and the weight of public opinion. She was the most well-travelled of any British monarch and her tireless work with hundreds of charities around the world set a precedent that has typified the role of a modern-day royal.

It seems bizarre then, when you consider the extent of her future reign, that the young Princess Elizabeth was barely a consideration for the throne as a child. Born on 21 April 1926, the daughter of Prince Albert, Duke of York, Elizabeth was at the time third in the line of succession behind her uncle, the Prince of Wales, and her father. However, as was royal protocol, it was assumed that her uncle would almost certainly father children of his own, pushing Elizabeth further down the line. She was never expected to become queen.

But to the young princess, such trivialities were of little concern. Nicknamed 'Lillibet' by her family, she enjoyed a close relationship with her father, her mother Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (later the Queen Mother) and her grandfather, George V. The king's health was already deteriorating by the time Elizabeth was born, but her regular visits and playful relationship with the ailing monarch were said to have buoyed his spirits far more than any medicine. Her positive effect was even covered by newspapers - a taste of just how obsessed the media could, and would, become with its own monarchy. Still, Elizabeth got to enjoy the pomp and privilege of being a royal without the pressures of being an heir apparent or an heir presumptive. However, no one could see the turn of events that came next.

The king was dead. George V had finally passed away from septicaemia on 20 January 1936, with the throne then passing to his eldest son, the Prince of Wales. Named King Edward VIII, it was apparent from the very start that Edward wasn't going to be a conventional king. Known for his vocal dislike of court protocols and politicians, the new monarch even broke convention by watching the proclamation of his own ascendancy from a window in St James's Palace. By his side stood Wallis Simpson, an American socialite whom the 41-year-old king had been courting for some time. Edward's association with the still-married Simpson was already causing outrage in royal and political circles alike, but it would take his decision ▶

In 1976, Queen Elizabeth sent her first email over ARPANET, a small-scale precursor to the internet to propose to her a few months later that would finally tip the balance.

Mounting pressure from the rest of the royal family and Parliament forced the king to choose between his duties as a monarch and his love for a woman judged too politically troublesome to be his queen. Edward, forever the rebel, chose his heart over his crown and abdicated on 10 December 1936 after 326 days as king (among the shorter reigns of British monarchs). This unforeseen decision threw Edward's younger brother, Elizabeth's father, onto the throne. With her father crowned George VI on 12 May 1937, the 11-year-old princess was no longer a carefree child, but an heir presumptive to the British throne. (An heir presumptive is someone who is first in line to the throne, but whose position can be superseded by a stronger claim – conversely, an heir apparent is someone in the same position, minus the chance of a challenge.)

It was during her early teens that Elizabeth met Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark. The two began a slow courtship, with Philip travelling regularly as part of his service in the Royal Navy – eventually the young couple announced their engagement on 9 July 1947. Her choice of fiancé caused friction with some members of the royal court. Philip had very little financial standing and his family had marital ties to the Nazi party in Germany, but his conversion from Greek Orthodoxy to Anglicanism and the taking of his mother's family name, Mountbatten, helped ease the union in the eyes of his detractors. The two married later that year on 20 November at Westminster Abbey. Despite the hundreds of presents the couple

As the first female monarch in 51 years, Elizabeth knew many challenges faced her in a rapidly changing world

THE ANNUS HORRIBILIS

1992 was an eventful and difficult year for Queen Elizabeth II

There were a number of challenging years in Elizabeth's considerable reign, but 1992 proved to be one her worst. Despite it marking the 40th anniversary of her accession to the throne, those 12 months were littered with political issues and startling catastrophes that likely pushed the normally resolute monarch to her limits. Elizabeth named the period her 'annus horribilis' (likely a reference to John Dryden's poem of the same name that describes London in the grip of the Great Plague and Great Fire of London in 1666).

It all started in March when her second son, Prince Andrew, Duke of York, separated from his wife Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York. The couple's official announcement stated the separation was amicable, but speculation was rife that all was not so rosy behind the scenes. These rumours seemingly sprung to life a few months later when photos of the duchess topless with her lover appeared all over the tabloid newspapers. It was an incredibly embarrassing episode for the royal household and it didn't bode well for the rest of the year.

The incidents continued a month after the duke and duchess' split in March with another member of the royal family. Her daughter Anne, the Princess Royal, had married Mark Phillips, a lieutenant in the 1st Queen's Dragoon Guards, in 1973 and it seemed another fairy-tale royal union to captivate the public. However, the couple decided to separate in 1989, citing years of strain stemming from Phillips' military commitments. In April 1992 the couple officially divorced, further adding to a media-fuelled story that the royal family was splintering under the strain of being in the public eye.

In June, things got even worse. The journalist Andrew Morton had just released his biography of the Princess of Wales, *Diana: Her True Story*, and it was filled with sensational stories regarding Diana and her deteriorating relationship with Prince Charles. The couple's fairy-tale relationship had been falling apart as early as the mid-1980s and the two were openly seeing other people despite still being married. Diana's affair with Major James Hewitt, Charles's liaison with Camilla Parker-Bowles and Diana's supposed suicidal thoughts were sensationalised in gruesome detail and it caused the Queen, and her whole royal family, a great deal of embarrassment for years to come.

To top it all off, one of the Queen's favourite residences was badly damaged by a raging inferno in the same year. On the 20 November – a mere four days before the Queen would give her Guildhall speech in which she referred to her year as her annus horribilis – Windsor Castle caught fire, causing severe damage to the whole structure. So bad was the damage that it cost an estimated £36.5 million to repair over the following five years. The blaze started when a spotlight caused a curtain to catch alight and it soon spread through the entire castle in a matter in minutes. There were no serious injuries and no deaths as a result of the blaze, but the royal administration was forced to open Buckingham Palace soon after in order to help fund the castle's restoration programme.

Despite his royal responsibilities as both a duke and then a king, George VI enjoyed a close and positive relationship with his two daughters

received from around the world, Elizabeth refused to allow the wedding to be a lavish affair.

As the health of King George VI began to deteriorate, Elizabeth and Philip's first two children were born - Prince Charles, born on 14 November 1948 and Princess Anne born on 15 August 1950. Elizabeth was enjoying her new role as mother, yet her responsibilities on behalf of the king were becoming more time-consuming as she travelled Europe on his behalf to visit those countries still recovering from the scars of World War II. On 6 February 1952, the king eventually succumbed to the melting pot of cancers and tumours that were robbing him of life. And, just like that, the 25-year-old princess became the new monarch of the realm.

Elizabeth was crowned at Westminster Abbey on 2 June 1953, following over a year's worth of national mourning for the late king. Elizabeth chose to retain her given name as her regnal title and, under the advisement of prime minister Winston Churchill and her mother, the surname of Windsor (instead of her husband's family name). Upon her accession she was officially crowned Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Union of South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka).

The Commonwealth Of Nations, as it would come to be known, was an idea that began to form before Elizabeth was even born, yet it was under her reign that the Commonwealth swelled in size and became more than a gathering of former British territories. Many of these overseas nations were beginning to crave autonomy from Britain and the new queen embraced the idea fully. She and Philip, now the Duke of Edinburgh, began a six-month tour of the Commonwealth almost immediately following her coronation. With Europe still in a state of physical, economical and political recovery from World War II, Elizabeth's arrival had an almost talismanic effect. She even travelled further afield, becoming the first British reigning monarch to visit both Australia and New Zealand.

In 1956, Elizabeth experienced her first political misstep. Following the rise of nationalism in Egypt, Britain made a joint attempt with France to take control of the Suez Canal in Egypt. It was a short-lived effort and Britain was forced to withdraw as the USA attempted to appease the situation diplomatically. It was an embarrassing episode for the Conservative administration at the time, made worse by rumours that Elizabeth had been against invasion from the start. The prime minister, Anthony Eden, denied such a claim, but it was enough to undermine his position and he soon resigned. At this time, the Conservative government had no formal process to appoint a new prime minister in the middle of a parliamentary term.

The decision fell to Elizabeth who, under advisement, appointed Harold Macmillan as Eden's replacement. The decision, along with the Suez Canal fiasco, led to considerable criticism of the ▶

> The Queen had two birthdays: an official one celebrated in June by the Trooping the Colour ceremony, and her real one on 21 April

With her reign lasting for seven decades, Elizabeth became an intrinsic part of Britain's cultural identity

Life in the time of Elizabeth II

EMPIRE TO COMMONWEALTH

During her reign, the realm evolved from the British empire into the Commonwealth of Nations. This transition is the result of the decolonisation of the empire into an intergovernmental organisation that consists of 53 nations (mostly former British colonies) that are recognised as equal member states.

A SHIFT IN POWER

The power the king or queen can enact upon the realm is a shadow of its former self. The time of absolute royal authority is no longer and Elizabeth II was bound by a constitutional agreement with Parliament that limits her influence over policies and legislation.

TRAVELLING THE GLOBE

Elizabeth II was the most well-travelled monarch in British history. As the head of the Commonwealth, she flew to Canada in 1958 and opened the 23rd Parliament there, which served as just one of the ways that the crown has recognised the semi-autonomy of its member states.

SILVER JUBILEE

In 1977, Elizabeth II celebrated the 25th anniversary of her accession to the throne. She and Prince Philip visited 36 counties – no monarch had visited so many parts of the UK within such a small amount of time.

MEDIA FRENZY

The media's focus on the royal family took an alarmingly sensational turn in the 1980s. The media ran endless stories about how the Queen disapproved of prime minister Margaret Thatcher's often unpopular policies, fuelling frequent rumours of a division between crown and government.

Once Elizabeth became queen, she travelled tirelessly across the world, including this trip to West Germany in 1965

Queen from MPs, lords and the media. It was a stark reminder that the days of the monarch as a ruler were firmly resigned to the history books.

So what were Elizabeth's political powers? Well, while Parliament holds autonomy from the crown in terms of its infrastructure, the king or queen still holds some administrative (be they mostly ceremonial) authorities. Elizabeth had the power to open and dissolve Parliament prior to a general election, as well the right to consult the prime minister on issues of state at any time. That's not to say that Elizabeth's position as queen was simply as a figurehead - as monarch, Elizabeth had to ratify all bills passed through Parliament. This is known as Royal Assent, and it's a political procedure that's not been refused since its creation in 1707. Even the Queen's speech (not to be confused with the Queen's Christmas message), delivered in Parliament every year, formed an important role, signifying royal approval of a new year in legislation.

While the 1960s and 1970s were a transformative period for Britain and the Commonwealth, with over 20 countries gaining independence, the 1980s were a mixed affair. Despite issues with rising unemployment, the nation was united in celebrating the union of Elizabeth's eldest son, Prince Charles with Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. It was a lavish affair and the young princess-to-be was a breath of fresh air for the royal family's public image. Sadly, the jovial public mood was curtailed when the Falklands War broke out the following year, ending after ten weeks.

> Despite all her travels, the Queen didn't own a passport. Since the crown issues them, she was exempt from needing one

The abdication
20 January-1 December 1936

1936 is a very tumultuous year for the royal family. In January, King George V (Elizabeth's grandfather) dies. The throne then passes to his eldest son Edward, who becomes Edward VIII. However, the uncrowned Edward chooses to abdicate less than 12 months later and his brother (and Elizabeth's father) the Duke of York becomes King George VI. With her father now presiding on the throne, Elizabeth becomes first in line to the throne at the age of ten. During this period, Princess Elizabeth is also referred to by the official title of 'heir presumptive'.

Elizabeth is crowned
2 June 1953

Following the death of her father, George VI, towards the end of 1952, the 26-year-old heir presumptive is finally crowned Queen Elizabeth II. Despite the tradition that the husband's surname is taken, it is decreed that Elizabeth will retain her family name of Windsor instead of Philip's name Mountbatten. At the time, Philip complains that, "I am the only man in the country not allowed to give his name to his own children." To appease the situation, the name Mountbatten-Windsor is adopted in 1960 for any male-line descendants who do not carry royal titles.

Timeline

1926

Elizabeth is born
Born Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor, the young princess is the daughter of Albert, Duke of York (later George VI) and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (later Queen and then Queen Mother).
21 April 1926

Marriage to Philip
Princess Elizabeth marries Philip at Westminster Abbey after almost 15 years of slow courtship. Since tensions are still running high from the global catastrophe that was World War II, Philip's German relatives are not permitted to attend.
20 November 1947

Prince Charles is born
A month prior to the arrival of Elizabeth's first son, Charles, her father George VI decrees that any of her children will retain the title of prince or princess. This overturns the rules set out by George V that restricted such titles to children of the monarch or the monarch's son.
14 November 1948

Princess Anne is born
The only daughter of Princess Elizabeth and Philip, Anne is born at Clarence House in the late morning. It's thought that the young princess was conceived at Villa Guardamangia, the royal couple's residence in Malta, where Philip is stationed as a Royal Navy officer.
15 August 1950

For over 70 years the Queen Mother remained a source of guidance and inspiration, up to her death in 2001

Despite the high points of the previous decade, the 1990s were a challenging time for Elizabeth and the rest of the royal family. The very public disintegration of Charles and Diana's marriage and their eventual separation in 1993 led to years of criticism of the royal family's conduct as Diana rose to prominence as a charity worker. This scrutiny would fail to abate, even when Diana was tragically killed in a car crash in Paris in 1997.

The first two decades of the new millennium have seen the royal family enjoy a far more positive reception in the public eye. The deaths of the Queen Mother and Elizabeth's younger sister, Princess Margaret, in the space of two months in 2002 saw an outpouring of public support for the Queen, which flowed seamlessly into celebrations for the golden jubilee later that summer. Not one to let personal feelings affect her royal duties, Elizabeth set out on an extensive tour of the Commonwealth and returned to mass celebrations that surprised many, most notably the media.

In 2011, the royal family celebrated as Prince William married his university sweetheart, Catherine Middleton, at Westminister Abbey. Together they have three children, Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis, born in 2013, 2015 and 2018 respectively. With Prince George's birth, the monarchy had three generations of direct heirs for the first time since Queen Victoria's reign.

A year after the royal wedding, Elizabeth celebrated her diamond jubilee, which further cemented the nation's more positive relationship with the crown, with celebrations across the land merging with excitement for London's hosting of the Olympics in 2012.

On 9 September 2015, Queen Elizabeth reached a historic milestone when she became Britain's longest-reigning monarch. Two years later, she celebrated her 70th wedding anniversary with Prince Philip, and the happy times continued with the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018. However, in January 2020, Harry and Meghan announced that they would be stepping down as working members of the royal family, eventually relocating to California.

Elizabeth II was the longest-reigning British monarch, surpassing Queen Victoria's prior record of 63 years and 216 days

2020 also saw the outbreak of COVID-19 and the Queen moved to Windsor Castle during the pandemic. In 2021, Elizabeth suffered a great personal loss when her beloved Prince Philip died at the age of 99. She was reportedly by his bedside when he died and due to the COVID-19 restrictions at the time, she sat at his funeral alone. Their marriage of 73 years was by far the longest in British royal history and Elizabeth paid tribute to her late husband in her annual Christmas speech.

With the arrival of 2022, the Queen celebrated yet another remarkable milestone, when she reached her Platinum Jubilee on 6 February. Events were held across Britain and the Commonwealth to mark her 70 years on the throne, and Elizabeth delighted the crowds by appearing twice on the Buckingham Palace balcony during the bank holiday celebrations in June. Apparently, the Queen was emotional and overwhelmed because of the goodwill and warmth shown to her by the public.

During the last few years of her reign, Elizabeth undertook fewer public engagements as her health began to deteriorate. However, it was still a shock to many when Buckingham Palace announced on 8 September that she was under medical supervision at Balmoral Castle, after doctors became concerned for her health. Elizabeth passed away later that day, aged 96, with Charles and Anne by her side.

Throughout her record-breaking reign, Elizabeth exuded the same principles of character she had learned in the early years of her rule. For decades, she was a symbol of stability for a nation that went through huge social, economic and political changes. The Queen had also welcomed a more modernised approach to monarchy, which will likely continue during the reigns of her son, King Charles III, and her descendants. ◆

> *"She understood her place in the anatomy of a modern nation"*

Prince Andrew is born
At the beginning of 1960 – almost seven years into her reign as queen – Elizabeth gives birth to her second son, Prince Andrew, in the Belgian Suite of Buckingham Palace. He is baptised three months later.
19 February 1960

Prince Edward is born
Four years after the birth of Andrew, Elizabeth gives birth to her third son Edward. The young prince is third in line to the throne at his time of birth, but in 2022 is now 13th in the order of succession; he's now known as the Earl of Wessex.
10 March 1964

The silver jubilee
In 1977, Elizabeth celebrates the first major anniversary of her accession. A monarch's jubilee is based on the date they were proclaimed king or queen rather than that of their coronation. To celebrate, festivities and parties are held all across the Commonwealth during the year.
1977

Charles weds Diana
After a widely publicised courtship, Prince Charles marries Lady Diana Spencer at St Paul's Cathedral in a ceremony that captivates Great Britain and the wider world. The marriage will produce two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry.
29 July 1981

The Golden Jubilee
In 2002, Elizabeth marks the 50th anniversary of her accession to the throne. Despite the celebrations across the Commonwealth, the event is bittersweet, as the Queen Mother and Elizabeth's sister Princess Margaret have died a few months previously.
2002

Birthday celebrations
2016
From the Queen's real birthday in April until after her official one in June, celebrations are held across the country to mark Elizabeth II's 90th birthday. After the death of King Bhumibol of Thailand in 2016, Queen Elizabeth II becomes the longest-serving head of state in the world. In 2017, she reaches her Sapphire Jubilee but instead of celebrating, the Queen decides to spend the day in quiet reflection, focusing instead on the memory of her father, whose death ensured that she ascended the throne. Also in 2017, Prince Philip retires from his official royal duties.

The Platinum Jubilee
In the summer of 2022, just over a year after Philip died, Elizabeth celebrates 70 years on the throne. There is a four-day Platinum Jubilee Central Weekend to mark the first time that any monarch in British history has celebrated a platinum jubilee.
2022

Queen Elizabeth II dies
Three months after celebrating her historic Platinum Jubilee, Elizabeth passes away peacefully at Balmoral Castle, Scotland. Her state funeral is held at Westminster Abbey and she is interred alongside Philip at the King George VI Memorial Chapel at Windsor Castle. She is succeeded by her son, King Charles III.
2022

2022

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